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November/December 2005 • Issue 35

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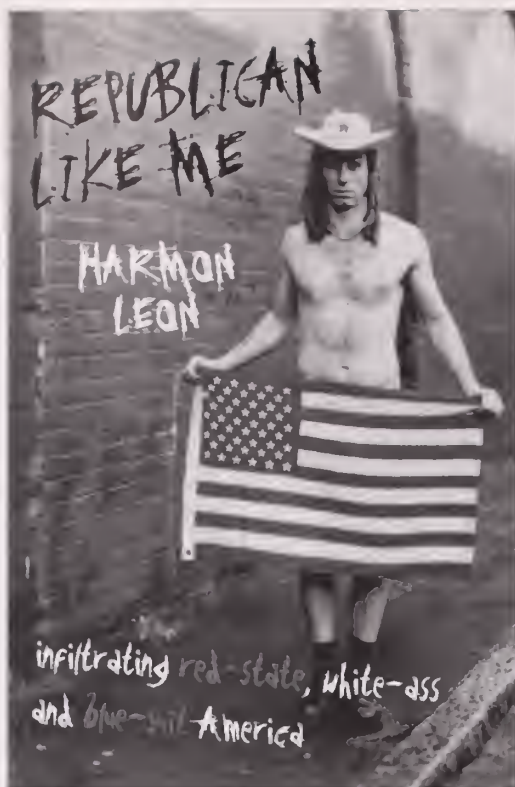


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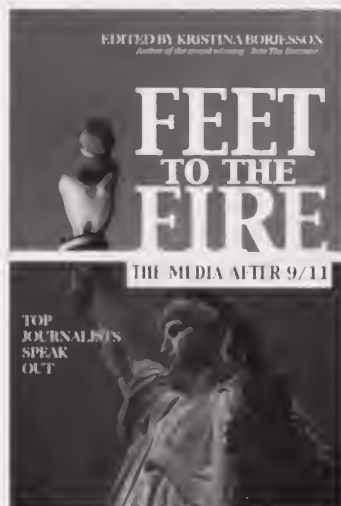
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from your editors

When choosing the theme for this issue, our editorial board collectively decided that we'd like to look at excess in the world – a subject many of us become intimately familiar with during the holiday season. Like most Americans, we're about to start gorging ourselves on holiday cookies and getting (and giving) gifts we don't want and can't afford, and by New Year's Day we'll have just about forgotten the credit card debt we rack up. That is, until the bills start coming in.

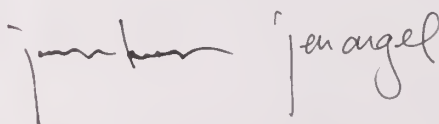
The New York Times and PBS reported last year that, "According to the Federal Reserve, the total amount of outstanding revolving consumer credit reached \$743 billion this year, nearly nine times the amount recorded 20 years ago." They went on to report that according to Fair Isaac, a company that helps banks assess credit risk, the average credit card balance is \$8,000, and that on average, today's consumer has a total of 11 credit obligations on record at a credit bureau; including department store charge cards, bank cards, mortgages, and student loans.

So what is it that causes many of us to live beyond our means? We're not all so easily wooed by crass consumerism that we run up our credit cards for the latest fashions and electronic gadgets, are we? No. Many of us HAVE to live beyond our means because our means aren't enough. Like many people working on projects with social justice missions, the folks here at Clamor HQ are experts at dealing with limited resources. We have credit cards, and we use them. Why? Because we're desperate. Well, not really, but more and more Americans are putting basic needs, such as food, on their credit cards instead of paying for them with cash. So all of this excess is balanced out quite nicely by scarcity – not enough money or resources to go around. Compound that with things like Katrina, economic depression in the rust belt, outsourcing, NAFTA/CAFTA, health care costs, an obscenely low Federal minimum wage, and, well, you get the picture.

We chose to cover "excess" and "scarcity" together because they're inextricably bound. People in Africa are fighting the privatization of water to simply get enough water to keep themselves alive. They're forced to fight because of the disproportionate distribution of water to the rich and poor. The timeless "haves" live in excess while the "have-nots" struggle for life on a day-to-day basis. Meanwhile, artists in San Francisco are creating art out of trash, Reverend Billy is busy calling out the corporations, and citizens in Philadelphia are fighting eminent domain to keep their homes.

In this issue you'll find examples of people making do with scarce resources to create vibrant democratic communities, challenging the powerful to distribute excess to the people who need more, or simply navigating the space between too much and not enough. These people are your neighbors. Your family. We hope you learn as much from them as we have.

Thanks for reading,



PS: As we might have expected, we had too many articles for this excess/scarcity issue, and had to postpone the letters and uproar sections this issue. You can send your letters to the editor to: letters@clamormagazine.org.

our mission

Clamor's mission is to provide a media outlet that reflects the reality of alternative politics and culture in a format that is accessible to people from a variety of backgrounds. Clamor exists to fill the voids left by mainstream media. We recognize and celebrate the fact that each of us can and should participate in media, politics, and culture. We publish writing and art that exemplify the value we place on autonomy, creativity, exploration, and cooperation. Clamor is an advocate of progressive social change through active creation of political and cultural alternatives.

clamor

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CUBAN

AMERICAN

PROGRESSIVE

Being a progressive Cuban in the U.S.
can often mean being politically isolated
and confronted by both the Left and Right.

introduction Mariana Ruiz

article Remy Kharbanda & Nadia Gonzalez

This issue of *Clamor* focuses on excess and scarcity, and we have taken the opportunity to examine unbalanced viewpoints and extreme interpretations of ideology or doctrine. One topic readily discussed in Leftist circles but often lacking depth is Cuba/U.S. relations, where the experience of progressive Cuban Americans is often overlooked or dismissed from both sides of the debate. Ironically, we are in a unique moment in history regarding Cuba.

The Communist regime of Fidel Castro – in power since January 1, 1959 – has been a thorn in the side of U.S. foreign policy. Within this 40 year Cold War legacy, recent U.S. policy changes towards Cuba demonstrate the Bush Administration's disdain for the sovereignty of any nation defining it's own political agenda. Government policies have tightened an already punitive and unjust embargo and increased absurd travel restrictions where Cuban Americans may travel to the country once every three years and where violators may face fines of \$25,000. The absence of solid economic planning by the Cuban state furthers hardship on the people. Poverty coupled with the lack of basic freedoms have forced the migration of Cubans to the U.S. in increasing numbers since the Special Period.

Fear keeps the Left from criticizing the Cuban government in the post 9-11 war on terror. Yet, only ongoing reflection can maintain the goals of the Revolution and social justice. Conservatives are already composing plans to descend on Cuba upon Castro's death. Thus the Left, which rarely prepares offensive strategies, must think critically about the Cuban Revolution.

The following article on progressive Cuban Americans represents one of the first attempts, from inside this community, to engage the Left and initiate a crucial dialogue, which is long overdue. There are criticisms of both the Right and Left tempered by opportunities for a new movement led by Cubans and Cuban Americans. This piece represents what *Clamor* strives for: a thoughtful analysis of the issues while threatening the status quo.

In the United States, discussion on Cuba has been dominated almost exclusively by a tendency to either denounce or glorify — the former representing the stance associated with the Right-wing lobby, including the more extremist elements of the Cuban exile community; the latter more commonly identified with the Left. The disparity has been exacerbated by the current political climate, where a conservative foreign policy agenda is increasingly prevalent and those on the Left are struggling to stay afloat. Our intent for this article is to ask: where are progressive Cuban Americans in this debate?

The complexity of Cuban American experiences is not reflected in the denounce-glorify paradigm. On one hand, progressive Cuban Americans reject the ideology of the Cuban political elite; on the other, they find the Left unbending and unwilling to tolerate open dialogue. Many feel silenced, limiting their ability to articulate an alternative progressive Cuban agenda.

Regardless of how they see themselves, Cubans are a politicized people, a by-product of U.S.-Cuba relations, intensified by the island's defiance of the U.S. for more than four decades. This article, based on conversations with a number of progressive Cuban Americans, intends to give voice to this community in hopes of diversifying the debate and reexamining

this mentality. "These people have a lot of power and a lot of money. If you don't affiliate with [them], you become a victim to their hostility." Yasmína mentioned such an incident involving a recent Cuban immigrant "[who] wouldn't get on the radio and denounce Fidel, so one day, while he was riding his bike through Miami, he was hit over the head with a baseball bat."

Furthermore, those we spoke with received little support from allies on the Left. Many experienced hostility and antagonism or have been confronted with stereotypes about their identity. "There is a stigma when you say that you are a Cuban from Miami," says Onel Mulet, a musician and artist who grew up in Miami. According to Lara Comstock Oramas, who identifies as queer and runs LEFTovers Progressive Catering Company, "the assumption tends to be that we all are Right-wing." Lara went on to comment on the tendency to conflate identity with politics, "If I'm doing something that is progressive, the assumption will be that that supersedes my identity." Others described encounters with activists who, excited to speak to a Cuban in the U.S., became less interested upon learning that the individuals had been raised in Miami.

"Progressives have written off Cubans," says Jorge Mursuli, a leading gay rights advocate who directed the Mi Familia Vota campaign in Miami in 2004, which registered over

The Left's position on Cuba — with a heady mix of ideology, a failure to question, and a need to compensate for and justify some of the Revolution's dysfunctions — has had the impact of denying Cuban Americans the opportunity to discuss current conditions in Cuba without being labeled reactionary ...

long-silenced progressive Cuban Americans as important political actors.

Growing up in Miami and being surrounded by more extremist elements of the Cuban exile environment discourages the expression of alternative viewpoints. Some of those we spoke with described a hostile and intimidating climate where any interest in Cuba or even minor differences in opinions casts suspicions and attracts aspersions. Pablo Soto, a musician and artist based in Berkeley, California, who moved to Miami from Havana when he was eight years old, spoke of how his interests in Cuban music and culture were viewed with suspicion: "the attitude was always, is it really that or is it that you are a communist?" Similarly, Yasmína Martínez (who asked that her real name not be used, fears any positive association with Cuba would negatively impact her livelihood), a musician born in Cuba but raised in New Jersey, told us, "If I'm not 100 percent against Fidel, 24/7, I'm branded as a communist and am blacklisted by the Miami lobby."

As the schoolyard chant goes, "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." Many are quick to explain, though, that it is not just a matter of name-calling. The extremist lobby assigns the label "Communist" aggressively, as a weapon to undermine, discredit, and silence their opponents. Pablo explains that it's not easy to challenge

70,000 new voters including many Cuban Americans. "The assumption is that our commitment to Republicans is deeply entrenched. [But] Cubans aren't monolithic." Jorge spoke about the absence of a progressive space in Miami, mentioning, for example, that there is only one Democratic representative in the city who speaks Spanish, highlighting the party's distance from the Cuban American community.

Maceo, who describes himself as a radical Cuban Un-American, poignantly articulated the impact such stereotypes create when attempting to connect to the traditionally Leftist organizations involved in Cuba solidarity work. "With one group in particular, when I told them that I was Cuban, their immediate concern was, did I support the Revolution." Maceo, who worked at a national education organization in New York before moving West, has experienced offensive encounters with predominantly white Leftists who have used the term *gusano* in relation to some members of the Cuban American community. Race relations are different in Cuba and the U.S. as many Cubans in Miami are perceived as "*blancos* of Spanish descent" in Cuban terms, explains Maceo; though they are still people of color in the U.S.

During a recent solidarity event in Brooklyn encouraging Americans to visit the island by challenging oppressive travel restrictions and maintaining communication between

the two countries, a well-regarded North American activist gave a presentation stating that there is minimal opposition to the Revolution on the island and no shortages, particularly of medications. By presenting himself as an authority on Cuba, he created an environment hostile to any opinion that challenged such generalizations, especially after a progressive Cuban raised objection to the comments and was subsequently dismissed.

Nadia, who came to the U.S. as a Cuban emigrant in 1986, felt obligated to challenge the presenter's comments, but not without first explaining their progressive political views in order to legitimize the comments. The event failed to highlight the specific impact of the travel restrictions on Cubans in this country, something that the Left should mobilize around given that thousands of Cubans in the U.S. have family in Cuba and would visit regularly.

The Left's position on Cuba — with a heady mix of ideology, a failure to question, and a need to compensate for and justify some of the Revolution's dysfunctions — has had the impact of denying Cuban Americans the opportunity to discuss current conditions in Cuba without being labeled reactionary and creating distance and mistrust where alliances and partnerships could exist. Lara says, "People on the Left — and it tends to be white Leftists — have a tendency to completely glorify Cuba. Yes, there are amazing things happening, but there's also a lot of hardship. So it's like glorifying the ghetto."

Based on their personal and political experiences, Cuban Americans have a more complex analysis than either the Left or Right acknowledge. What may seem like ambiguity or contradiction to some is really the consequence of a multifaceted issue. As Lara says, "It makes me so angry because while I don't completely support the Cuban government, I'm not Right-wing. At the same time, I have been to Cuba and seen the hardship my family has to deal with." A political refugee who fell out of favor with the Cuban government after making a film about HIV/AIDS in Cuba and asked to remain anonymous, echoes similar sentiments: "I can't choose between the U.S. government and the way the Cuban government is right now. For me, it is very frustrating dealing with Cuba. But I am passionate about my country's revolutionary history."

According to Hugo Perez, a filmmaker and writer who grew up in Miami, "most Leftists have allowed ideology to cloud their vision. The most I can do is point things out, but sometimes it's not worth it because they're so inflexible." The rigidity experienced by many from their comrades on the Left

undermines the lived experiences of progressive Cuban Americans. Seventy-seven percent of Cubans in Miami have family in Cuba. "When it comes to your family, you can't look the other way for the sake of ideology," says Alex Idavoy, Assistant Professor of Spanish and son of political refugees.

"The Left is insensitive to the pain of Cuban Americans who suffered and continue to suffer [dually] for the struggles of their parents and being separated from Cuba," explains Onel. Pablo has strong feelings about the authority that Cubans have versus those who see and experience Cuba less intimately, "It really upsets me when some people feel like they can tell me how things are [in Cuba] when they don't know what's happening, they don't live it the way I do. I try to tell them that the reality is much more complex than what they're describing."

"The Left is insensitive to the pain of Cuban Americans who suffered and continue to suffer [dually] for the struggles of their parents and being separated from Cuba," explains Onel [Mulet].

According to Yasmina, "there is no room on the Left because people feel the strong need to defend Cuba." Recently, many on the Left, citing bumped up sanctions and increased hostility from the U.S. government, have argued that the need to defend the Cuban Revolution outweighs the need to be constructively critical. One Cuban American involved in the progressive Cuban American movement told us that the embargo is a product of the de facto U.S. war on Cuba and he could not engage in any dialogue about current problems in Cuba lest he be seen as empowering Cuba's enemies at a time when the nation's sovereignty is vulnerable.

Regla Guzman, a high school teacher born in Cuba and raised in Brooklyn who describes herself as Left-leaning, understands these concerns yet prefers open dialogue. As she explains, "there have to be changes, but I also see the point about not articulating criticism of Cuba right now because it could be used and distorted. But I also feel it's worth taking those chances if we want changes to take place, because they're not going to happen by themselves. And those on the Right are going to do it anyway."

Progressive Cuban Americans believe in social justice as much as those on the Left and see an honest dialogue as complementing such struggles. Pedro Benitez, a *balsero* who came to the U.S. at 18, says, "Cuba gave me things I did not realize until I came to this country, for example, a good education." At the same time, however, he emphasizes that we "should be critical whenever the need arises." As Regla articulates, "we have to question and strive to make things better. If we don't analyze and only glorify, how will we grow?"

The main hope of most progressive Cuban Americans in speaking openly and honestly about current conditions is not to undermine Cuba but to make it better, for their own families in Cuba and for all Cubans. As Pablo states, "it's very personal

As Lara [Comstock Oramas] says, "It makes me so angry because while I don't completely support the Cuban government, I'm not Right-wing. At the same time, I have been to Cuba and seen the hardship my family has to deal with."

Despite their hopes for Cuba, many are wary and unclear about how to proceed. This is largely due to the political "black hole" that progressive Cuban Americans have occupied on these issues, impeding the development of a progressive identity.

to be able to talk about and criticize my country. I understand very intimately what's happening to my family and my Cuban brothers and sisters." It is the inability and unwillingness to be self-critical that stagnates movements and threatens Cuba's sovereignty as the post-Castro era approaches.

Everyone interviewed was adamant about their desires for Cuba's future and the need for Cuba's autonomy to be respected, indicating a commonality with those on the Left. "I hope that after Castro, people opt for not losing their identities to the U.S.," Alex says. Pablo expressed, "My wish is that Cuba not be exploited by anyone. I don't want Cuba to become like Puerto Rico." These shared sentiments need to be nurtured in order to build a strong and supportive link to aid Cuba in her impending transition.

Despite their hopes for Cuba, many are wary and unclear about how to proceed. This is largely due to the political "black hole" that progressive Cuban Americans have occupied on these issues, impeding the development of a progressive identity. Conversely, many of those we spoke with are active in other movements but are neither politically vocal nor active on Cuban issues. For some, being excluded from the debate is what has impaired the larger community's ability to realize their potential as important actors.

Nevertheless, there is a nascent realization that the destiny of the progressive Cuban American community requires a space reflecting the "grey" area from which they should articulate an alternative agenda. "If more progressive Cuban Americans organized, it would help Cubans in Cuba as well as Cubans in this country. It would also help with American politics toward Cuba," says Pedro. Despite the sense of alienation, there is a desire to develop a movement representing the outlook and experiences of a progressive Cuban American generation, without the fear of retribution. Tools for communicating beyond the Left or Right would overcome the shared sense of isolation and move toward creating progressive leadership.

Clear communication develops avenues for engagement with Cubans in Cuba, particularly important in light of recent policy changes to the embargo and travel restrictions. Many expressed a desire to work with and build stronger ties to Cubans on the island considering the imminent political transitions. They suggested that recent immigrants or "new Cubans" should lead such organizing efforts, given their stronger bonds to the island and their abilities to bridge the gap between Cubans in the U.S. and in Cuba.

Maceo wrote in the essay "*Dejé enterrado mi corazón*" (I left my heart buried), "there is this myth that all Cubans are

Republicans. Did you know that only eight percent of Cubans in Miami vote?" There is a large population of disenfranchised Cuban Americans, unrepresented in the U.S. political arena. A progressive Cuban American electoral voice could fill the gap brought about by the decreasing influence of the Cuban American political elite.

While they do exist, progressive Cuban American organizations are few and far between. Based on our interviews, there is a pressing need for this community, which is hampered by being scattered over a wide geographic area, to begin by building a base and initiating internal dialogue before articulating a political agenda. This could serve as a platform from which Cuban Americans could build solidarity with Cuba at the electoral level. Aside from conventional politics, which many expressed frustration with, other ways to build a community are *encuentros*, intimate gatherings focused on initiating discussion on shared interests regarding Cuba. A number of progressive Cuban Americans are already exploring alternative ways to dialogue through writing, music, and the arts. For example, during the special period, the "Bridges to Cuba" project sought to reestablish conversations between Cubans in both countries.

The Left can play a vital role in supporting this community by engaging with progressive Cuban Americans (as is done with other progressive struggles) and redressing tendencies that disregard the input of the progressive Cuban American community. Those on the Left who organize in other struggles need to make a concerted effort to reach out to Cuban Americans as a community and support their base-building. Alex recommends that Democrats reach out to progressive Cuban Americans in the same way that Republicans have reached out to the conservative Cuban community.

Ultimately, the Left and progressive Cuban Americans should support Cubans on the island in determining their country's future. As Pablo asserts, "I think it's important that progressive Cuban Americans support Cuba in its transition. But I think my cousins who are in Cuba need to take the lead." ★

Remy Kharbanda is a New York-based activist and community researcher of South Asian descent.

Nadia Gonzalez was born in Cuba and arrived to the United States at the age of 16 in 1996. She attended CUNY Hunter College where she studied psychology and Latin American Literature.

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A Prescription for Torture

words Marie-Jo Proulx illustration Frank Reynoso

In the span of a few months, and right under our noses, the involvement of American doctors in torture has gone from unthinkable to technically legal, to tacitly ethical. As the Bush Administration effectively decriminalized the practice in Washington D.C., the lobbying machine and association supposed to defend the integrity of the medical profession is silently prescribing torture for military use.

Since its inception in 1847, the American Medical Association (AMA) has spoken as *the* voice of the medical profession. That is certainly how it presents itself when lobbying Congress and state legislatures on reforms to Medicare reimbursement and medical liability. Yet today, two out of three doctors are not joining the AMA. But the Chicago-based organization also has a conscience: the Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs (CEJA), which oversees what is possibly the world's most comprehensive Code of Medical Ethics. Its principles and opinions are founded on the Hippocratic Oath, which first asserts that a physician shall "do no harm."

One thousand delegates attended the AMA's annual meeting in June, where a resolution entitled "Opposing Cooperation of Physicians and Health Professionals in Torture" was introduced by the Section on Medical Schools. It stated that, "It has been reported since the spring of 2004 that the U.S. military medical system in Guantanamo Bay, Afghanistan and Iraq ... failed to promptly report injuries or deaths caused by beatings, failed to report acts of psychological and sexual degradation, and sometimes collaborated with abusive interrogators and guards..." It also called on the AMA to condemn physicians' participation in mental or physical torture; support the right of physicians refusing to take part in torture to be protected from retribution; and encourage all medical schools to include training on ethical conduct and internationally recognized codes of professional behavior.

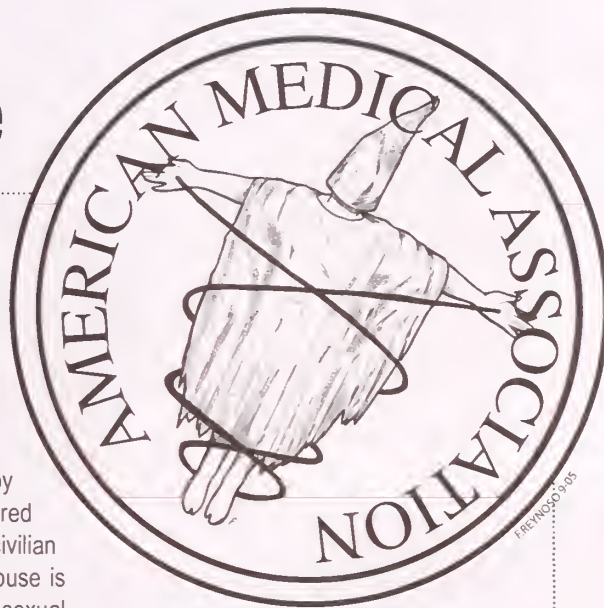
The resolution was debated in a packed room presided over by the Reference Committee on Amendments to Con-

stitution and Bylaws. Delegates lined up at the microphone to offer testimony. Many doctors in uniform spoke of their own experience caring for soldiers and prisoners of war in past conflicts. Some accused the sponsors of the resolution of being influenced by fabricated media reports. One retired medical officer pointed out to his civilian colleagues in the audience that abuse is not the same as torture. Citing the sexual degradation in the Abu Ghraib pictures, he declared that such treatment, while deplorable, legally did not constitute torture. Listening in their seats, many shook their heads in disbelief.

Others read prepared statements and described the thorough education in professional ethics they had received as physicians of the Armed Forces. But it is worth remembering that the large-scale deployment of Reserves (trained in civilian institutions) now means that when it comes to ethics, uniform ethical standards are no longer a reality on the ground.

The following day, the House of Delegates voted to change the title of the resolution to "Medical Treatment of Prisoners of War and Detainees" and the entire language relating to torture was edited out. An hour of testimony determined that the AMA did not want to go up against the same administration it petitions on other issues dear to doctors' pocketbooks. Perhaps as a sign of appreciation, the AMA's then-president, Dr. John C. Nelson, was appointed on July 8 to the new Health & Human Services Medicaid Advisory Commission.

Once the diluted resolution was adopted, the AMA's media office released a memorandum received earlier in the week from Dr. William Winkenwerder, Jr., Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs. Sent to Dr. Nelson, the memo is a re-issue of the military's policy on medical treatment of detainees. It contains unclear guidelines such as "To the extent practicable, treatment of detainees should be guided by professional judgments and standards similar to those that would be applied to personnel of the U.S. Armed



Forces." The deliberately ambiguous language raises serious questions. An obvious one is "would be applied" by whom: U.S. doctors or enemy captors? But the AMA isn't asking.

The policy also differentiates between physicians providing treatment to detainees and those "engaged in non-treatment activities." On June 27, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) issued a statement condemning the creation of two classes of psychiatrists. After quoting its own ethical guidelines, the APA, in what can only be interpreted as an appeal for support, pointedly refers to the AMA's Principles of Medical Ethics. But CEJA isn't listening.

If the AMA wants to salvage its rapidly dwindling legitimacy and recruit new members with its recently branded "Together We Are Stronger" sales pitch, it needs to review its origins and honor the Hippocratic Oath. It must go on record against torture and start clamoring for an independent inquiry into torture practices. Until then, it should be exposed as the self-serving \$16M business lobby it has become. Foreign militaries are not the only participants in the Coalition of the Willing. On military sanctioned torture, the AMA is a most precious domestic ally. ☆

Marie-Jo Proulx is a senior writer for Windy City Times, and a volunteer interpreter for survivors of torture seeking asylum status.



an interview with David Enders

interview Emily Schmall photo University of Michigan Press

The occupation of Iraq and the war on terror follow no linear history. Instead, the fragments of truth and the images of a city destroyed fall upon our eyes and ears like war debris. Yet, some reporting manages to illuminate the life existing beneath the rubble.

David Enders is a 24-year-old independent journalist who has been covering post-occupation Iraq since 2003. His new book, *Baghdad Bulletin*, is named for the magazine he co-founded, the first English-language publication to emerge after the U.S. invasion. The book chronicles the actions and sentiments of the soldiers, citizens, activists and politicians currently in the country. Emily Schmall spoke with Enders on the eve of his recent July trip to Baghdad. He says he plans to continue to "chart the American project in Iraq, or the Iraqi reaction to that project."

You're going back tomorrow. Why?

Since finishing the book last year I've continued to report from the country and I'm going back to continue reporting, both for *The Nation* and for *Mother Jones*.

At what point did you realize you were writing a book?

Sometime last year the University of Michigan contacted me and asked if I'd be interested in doing a book for them about the magazine, I think it was around April of 2004.

Were you journaling? How were you keeping a record?

Yeah, I was writing diary entries, and keeping a blog, more than anything to let my friends and family know that I was alive. Also the woman I was dating at the time kept most of our correspondence, which was extremely helpful in going back and writing the book. Since I wrote a lot of it sort of first-person having the correspondence from then really helped a lot.

As a reader, and a journalist, I noticed that it seemed you established a certain level of fraternity, or at least empathy, with many of the male characters who appear in your book — among them, drivers, translators, and even the U.S. soldiers. Do you think a woman would have been as successful at avoiding harm and gaining the trust of Iraqis and of U.S. soldiers?

[We had women on our staff] who were quite capable of doing that, at least as foreign women. I think for Iraqi women it's extremely tough. It's interesting that you bring that up because for the last year as I was finishing the book, I began working with a woman in Baghdad, a female translator. I've written a lot about [her situation] for *Mother Jones*, that as an Iraqi woman and an Arab woman and a Muslim woman, she's had to deal with — male colleagues and come-ons from men — in all sorts of different positions, and the unequal position [that Iraqi women occupy there]. Whereas in the case of our staff at the magazine, Kathleen McCall — who was my age, with no journalism experience — came out to report for us and became a correspondent who was on par with correspondents from all sorts of western news outlets. [Many were] working on stories about the Shiite groups in Iraq and Muqtada al-Sadr and his, at the time, budding resistance movement. The Sadr guys [told] me that Kathleen was the first woman to actually interview Muqtada al-Sadr and that they actually had to convince their political leader to admit a woman to interview him.

If there are more female journalists in the country, both Iraqi journalists and foreign journalists, [couldn't such interactions] be positive?

Yeah, and at the time it was certainly a very positive thing. But of course change on a systemic level, especially in the case of women's rights, is only going to come internally and through the hard work of a number of very brave women's rights activists who are operating in the country and [are locally based].

Why did you decide to be affiliated with Occupation Watch, an activist organization, when you returned to Baghdad for the second time?

I wanted to go back and had some stuff to wrap up for the magazine — in part, just assessing the situation — because the final decision to close down the magazine was made by my cofounder while I was out of the country and without my full consent at the time. I was very moved to go back, both to find out what had happened to our staff members and whether it was possible to continue operating. Also, I went there as a concerned American citizen and as an activist. I was interested in what Occupation Watch was doing, and what they had done in the Palestinian territories. I and some other activists I knew were discussing the possibility of a similar kind of movement in Baghdad. I helped them plan a trip in which families of service members who were currently in Iraq [including] a man named Fernando Suarez de Solar, the father of a marine killed in 2003, [traveled] to Iraq with Global Exchange, to visit the site where his son died and to meet Iraqis. I think that's really what drew me to Global Exchange: the bottom line for them was bring[ing]

these people together, [which were] the most powerful moments of my time in Iraq.

In the book rarely do we hear a voice of support for the occupation force, particularly toward the end. How did expectations change over the course of the time you were there?

There was a period when we started the magazine where resistance to the occupation did not have any popular support. Iraqis were waiting to see what would happen with the occupation government and troops, or in some cases, supporting them and in fewer cases, willing to fight against them. Increasingly, [they] saw American troops as a force that was not in Iraq to bring freedom and democracy. No one ever really believed that the reasons for the occupation were altruistic ones; but they hoped that maybe some good would come of this, that the byproduct of the invasion would be an Iraqi society that was pluralistic and to some extent free.

It took three or four months before Iraqis started to become very fed up with the occupation. Then you had mistakes like the disbanding of the military at the behest of the Coalition Provisional Authority, the U.S. occupation authority, doing things like shutting down newspapers, and not protecting them. [That's] when you really saw a great dissatisfaction from Iraqis. Now you have a point where most Iraqis feel that there will be no return to any sort of normalcy until American troops are gone from the country.

And there are some who go further and say that the occupation force could even spur a civil war.

To some extent you already have a civil war taking place around the U.S. forces.... The greater fear is that we're providing arms to one side as we did in the past with Saddam Hussein. Eventually it seems we'll start arming [one] faction of Iraqi society against other factions.

Was the downturn following the April 2004 Abu Ghraib scandal as instantly as it was portrayed?

No, because the reaction of most Iraqis was, 'well, now they believe us.' Some of my colleagues and I had been collecting widespread reports from all over the country of that sort of abuse months before those photos were released, and of course it came to light that most of the abuse depicted in the photos had taken place in the fall of that year. Whereas, that gave a very literal and visible face to what was happening, the ground-

It took three or four months before Iraqis started to become very fed up with the occupation ... Now you have a point where most Iraqis feel that there will be no return to any sort of normalcy until American troops are gone from the country.

work had already been laid. I don't think anyone was terribly surprised. It's important to remember that we continue to incarcerate people. The military is holding more people in Iraq than it has at any other point of the occupation.

In Iraq, are those images used as rallying points?

Yeah, they're images that have certainly been burned into the collective memory, but [are not] the image of the occupation. While that's a unifying symbol in some ways, Iraqis have their own very personal images of what the U.S. military venture has meant to them.

It's important to remember that we continue to incarcerate people. The military is holding more people in Iraq than it has at any other point of the occupation.

And each memory is visceral.

Certainly. It's hard to explain just what it sounds like to have tanks driving down the street at night. It's hard to imagine what it's like to have another army deployed on your streets and to be in the middle of a guerrilla war, and the psychological effect.

When you were first there you presented yourself openly as an American journalist, but as the political climate worsened, you decided to go into disguise as an Iraqi. Were you received differently?

From Iraqis, not particularly, it was about a year and a half before I had to start dressing like an Iraqi to pass when I was on the street or driving out of Baghdad by car. The thing I noticed was that the way I was treated by the U.S. military changed. Whereas before, I was comfortable shouting out in English on the street or being very evidently Western so that when they would come across me in a public setting, the troops would be surprised, they'd say, "What is an American doing out here unarmed?" When they just assumed I was an Iraqi, it was a somewhat hostile encounter. I would have guns pointed at me or my camera grabbed. In one case, some troops almost [incited] a riot when they grabbed my camera in front of a whole bunch of Iraqis who thought that I was an Iraqi. You see these troops out here who are very frightened and where anyone is perceived to be a threat.

In the book, you reprinted a somewhat scathing letter to the editor written by an Iraqi who seemed to conflate the efforts and purpose of your magazine with those of the U.S. military. Do you think this happened often, and how did you distinguish yourselves?

Well, we prominently displayed on the cover of the magazine the assertion that we were not affiliated with the U.S. military or government, and this was simply for our own safety. We also did not seek out money from USAID or any other American organizations. We were carefully avoiding the perception that we were working for or with the military. The reason we

felt comfortable with the project was because all of the Iraqis, members of political parties (and important following the invasion), were all very supportive of the venture and wanted to be involved. We always said that once no one locally wants to work with us is when it's time to leave – it's too unsafe. And so, it wasn't terribly hard to distance ourselves from the military because we found ourselves printing things that were very critical of the military, enabling Iraqis to print things in English that were very critical of the military. My biggest fear in getting involved was this notion of cultural imperialism, insinuating that Iraqis are not capable of doing something like that themselves. So I found myself taking cues from Iraqi staff members, except when dealing with reporting from Washington or London, the stuff we reported on the ground. And I think that's the bottom line of what allowed us to remain safe while we were there.

There was virtually no free press under the regime of Saddam Hussein. Have you seen things open up?

Certainly, there have been a number of new magazines, television stations, radio stations. Before you had a very restrictive government in regards to the press, and now you have chaos. And for what it's worth, the government was once the only actor that could suppress the press, now you have a situation where people who decide to print freely are in danger of being assassinated. You also have a situation where people can easily print things that are untrue, or inflammatory, or potentially dangerous. So for better or for worse, Iraq now has a free press, but that in itself has a lot of problems.

You've said that it is the responsibility of those with perspective to keep going back to Iraq. How has your perspective aided you as a journalist?

I think my perspective at this point relies on the fact that I still have Iraqi friends who are willing to take me into situations where I'm taking a huge chance, for myself and for them, of passing in these situations and continuing to report. When you look at it, the country's only been open since the invasion, and there aren't a lot of reporters with a lot of experience in Iraq. There are a lot of us who have been going back and forth since the invasion, and a lot of journalists who have reported from there before. For this new crop of journalists who've dealt with Iraq, I do have a considerable amount of experience, and I hope that I can continue to go back and give that perspective of what has changed over the last couple of years, and to chart the American project in Iraq, or the Iraqi reaction to that project. And I think the most important perspective to have is even this short historical perspective. ★

Review Baghdad Bulletin online at www.baghdadbulletin.com. Currently inactive, archives are still available.

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NOAM CHOMSKY

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TWEAKED

crystal meth, sex, and HIV

words: Tara Lohan illustration: Ian Adcock

It started with a “key bump” in a bathhouse in Chicago. It started with snorting just a bit of it off a key and then smoking it and then injecting it. It started with one hit and a six-hour high and it did not end for four and a half years. It did not end when friends and family disappeared or jobs and money were lost. It did not end with being homeless. It did not even end with being diagnosed as HIV positive. It takes more than hitting rock bottom for someone to quit.

Sean (not his real name) is beautiful. He is 31 and has a wide smile and gorgeous eyes. He does not look like someone a year into recovery from a drug addiction that cost him almost everything.

“I once said that using it was like getting an all-day ride pass at the amusement park. But I realized that you pay for that ride with your life,” he said.

Crystal, meth, tina, methamphetamine, are all names for the drug that triggers the release of norepinephrine and dopamine. It has been wreaking havoc in gay communities across the country and in some places, such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York, has been reported by health agencies to be responsible for over a third of new HIV infections. The website Tweaker.org, a clearinghouse of information on meth, explains that the drug first gained popularity in gay communities in Los Angeles in the early 1990s and then moved to New York and Miami and just about every town in between.

The drug keeps people awake, makes them feel sexual, and limits inhibitions. Ramon Johnson of About.com's *Gay Life* called it the "fastest growing drug in the gay community" and Charles Karsters, the prevention manager at Being Alive HIV/AIDS Action Coalition, called meth the "perfect gay drug." However, it has also been a deadly combination for many gay and bisexual men because normal safety precautions disappear in the blur of the drug.

Sean is among a growing number of gay men to sample the drug and then get hooked. For almost five years he would use, and then quit for two or three months, and then use again. But each time he used, like many who take meth, he would go on a binge for several weeks at a time.

Sean's job required that he travel. After his first introduction to meth when he was in his mid 20s, he was hooked. "Every city I went to I would go to a bathhouse and find meth or I would go to bars and ask," he said. "I would get to recognize what people looked like when they were 'tweaking.' I would look at their eyes and I would just find it. I would stop at nothing to find it."

Crystal meth is reported to be a powerful stimulant that affects the nervous system. The Office of National Drug Control Policy reported that, "It increases energy and alertness...and can lead to psychotic behavior, paranoia, and hallucinations." Sean's experiences were similar. "You don't sleep. I would stay up for five days, if I had enough. And when you start to fall out you want more," he said. "Physically it eats you up. First of all, you are putting poison into your body; you are up and not eating. You are emaciated, dehydrated, and sleep-deprived. You get crazy real quick. By the second day I start hallucinating. Shadows become people. Street signs become people. Trees are people. Then I get paranoid by the third day and that is when I would constantly think I heard police sirens."

What you do at night follows you when the sun comes up, Sean learned. When he finally came out of a binge he would find himself in excessive pain. After sleeping for a day, he'd wake up sick and in a depression that was unrivaled. "It is horrifying. You want to die. You feel like you are almost dead because you haven't had any nutrients for so many days," he said.

The drug makes it difficult to keep friends and jobs. Sean moved to different cities and learned to find other "tweakers" who were up all day and night as well. What he found in meth was a place to hide. "As a drug addict and alcoholic, I like to escape, and that combination of sex escape and drug escape was very appealing," he said. "But your sexual inhibitions and your safety precautions are just out the window. You are a slave to meth, to the sexual urge, that craving. So I would have sex with two to eight people a night or a day, who knew what was what."

Sean believes that HIV has been glamorized lately in the magazines with hot, buff guys advertising the newest "cocktail" and positioned under lettering that says, "HIV is no longer a death sentence." Sean grew up just after the worst of the epidemic and knew that he was supposed to use condoms. At 15 he volunteered at New Mexico AIDS Services. "Then you get desensitized," he said. "And there is no longer an urgency in our community for the younger people because we didn't have the loss and we didn't suffer the heartache. You forget about it and it is so easy to justify not using a condom when

you are high. You just don't care. The need to satisfy your selfish and self-centered craving takes over, and life preservation is the last thing on your mind. I lost all strength, all will, all respect for myself."

The *Advocate* recently reported that the Centers for Disease Control revealed an 11 percent increase in HIV diagnoses for gay and bisexual men between 2000 and 2003. "Anti-HIV drugs that mask the disease, Internet sex partnering, and increased methamphetamine use means that 'old prevention messages no longer work,'" the article reported, quoting Dr. Jeffrey Klausner of the San Francisco Department of Public Health.

The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center (LAGLC) released a study showing that one-third of those newly diagnosed as HIV positive had used meth. The study also showed that gay and bi men who used the drug were 300-400 percent more likely to test positive.

A new concern over meth use and HIV occurred in February when a man in New York City tested positive to a highly resistant and rapidly progressing strain of the virus that is believed to have been spread at New York sex parties where meth use is prevalent.

Jean Malpas, a psychotherapist in New York City who has many gay clients, believes the use of meth in the gay community is linked to many deep-seeded issues, including internalized homophobia and depression.

Malpas is careful to point out that gay communities are not the only ones using meth. *Urban 75* reports, "Once very big amongst some of the U.S. gay community but now spreading fast into mainstream culture, meth was originally used by bikers and truckers to stay awake on long journeys. Crystal is made of highly volatile, toxic substances (based on such chemical 'precursors' as methylamine and amyl amine) that are melded in differing combinations, forming what some have described as a 'mix of laundry detergent and lighter fluid.'"

Malpas believes that each community needs to look at the problem contextually. "It is important to look at the social and political reasons, including a lack of equality for gay people," said Malpas. We are still learning, he said, what the long-term multigenerational impacts of HIV/AIDS will be on the community and on the emotional impacts of being gay today.

Many in the gay community are beginning to address the problem, sometimes called "the other epidemic," including meth-specific support groups that have been formed at lesbian and gay centers. New advertising campaigns such as, "Buy Crystal, Get HIV Free," highlight the multiple dangers of using meth.

Once hooked, it is difficult to shake the drug. For Sean, it only took a few years before he progressed from snorting the drug to shooting up, the ultimate rush, and the place from which there is usually little chance to ever turn back. Most "tweakers" who inject don't teach other people how to do it, explains Sean. "If you ask, they say 'Your life is over once you start shooting up, you know that right?'"

Someone did teach him to inject, though.

Of course, he learned that it is not glamorous. If you miss a vein, it goes into your muscle and you get a golf-ball size lump that turns red, burns and it impairs your nerve function.

There is a progression with a meth addiction. It is a road that leads quickly from excess to scarcity. It begins, Sean ex-

"If you put 30 people in a room and give them alcohol every day maybe two or three are going to become alcoholics, but if you take 30 people and put them in a room and give them crystal meth, every single person is going to come out of there craving crystal meth, and if you have a predisposition to be an addict, it is hell crawling out of that. It is hell."

plains, when you have lots of money and you are in a nice hotel with lots of friends and drugs and having great sex. And then slowly you have less money and consequently fewer friends and fewer drugs. The hotels get cheaper and cheaper until you find yourself in a motor lodge in Reno.

"You have blotchy skin and you are thin as hell and weak and you have been living on beer, crystal meth, and cigarettes. You can't even have sex anymore, you are just a tweaky mess and a shell of your former self," he said. "And then you don't even have money for that and those friends are gone and you are depressed and you are still up and wandering the streets. That is a living nightmare that I would not wish on any of my young gay brothers."

Of course not everyone is going to end up an addict, but you don't know if you will be that person. Stop AIDS Project in San Francisco reported that meth is more addictive than heroin and many develop a full-blown addiction just six months after trying the drug. People move rapidly from feeling like they have it all, to actually having nothing. Crystal Meth Anonymous, which began in 1999 in New York City, has 24 meetings a week now and sometimes 100 or more people at a meeting.

"If you put 30 people in a room and give them alcohol every day maybe two or three are going to become alcoholics," said Sean. "But if you take 30 people and put them in a room and give them crystal meth, every single person is going to come out of there craving crystal meth, and if you have a predisposition to be an addict, it is hell crawling out of that. It is hell."

Sean has been in recovery for a year. He has been HIV positive for two years. He has been working to deal with the shame that comes with addiction — the shame of having hurt loved ones and himself.

If you haven't ever tried the drug, don't, Sean says. Don't smoke it or snort it or put it in your veins. "You lose yourself, you lose your strength and your ability to rationalize and respect yourself as a strong gay man," he said. "You become a slave to it. You see it on those sleazy talk shows — and before it happens to you, you think, 'how could someone do that?' And then it happens to you and it doesn't make sense until this thing turns your life inside out and you are a prisoner. All the strength you thought you had, all the stuff you thought wouldn't happen to you ... well, you are it, you are the now the guest on 'Maury Povich' and it is pathetic and you can't stop until you get into recovery."

Sean finally realized that he was powerless over the drug. People in his life were saying, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different

result." Sean had been using and swearing he would quit and then using again for years. And finally he gave up and realized he needed help.

With a 12-step program and the support of family, he is putting his life back together again — something that is possible for addicts, if they can admit they need help, he said. "I was lucky. There were one or two people who did not give up on me."

Sean still has using dreams at night, and he has regular trips to the doctors to check his health. Physically, Sean feels good right now. He is not on any medications for the virus and his T-cells are high. "But reality sets in when I go for my three month doctor appointment and I see people who are very sick around me, and I think, 'that is what I have to look forward to, maybe.' And the drugs are no picnic, from what I hear, they are just a nightmare to take, and I get very nervous when I visit the doctor. I wonder if this is the month the virus is starting to take over my T-cells," he said.

Sean doesn't date right now, especially because he is in his first year of recovery and is working on paying back debts — both emotionally and financially. "Sex is not a free, fun, casual thing anymore now that I'm positive," he said. "I don't think about being positive every day but it is there. Today I have a cold. It is just a cold, but I'm terrified."

But Sean also has a second chance, too. "Life is fabulous and there is so much out there, and I like being conscious for it now and contributing something useful to the world. It is a lot better than shame. Shame is toxic," he said.

Right now, recovery is life or death. "I go to meetings to remind myself even when I'm feeling great that all it takes is one time and I'm right back to being homeless. I am homeless so fast, because I don't stop," he said. "It is all because I did a 'key bump' a couple years ago." ☆

For more information on methamphetamine addiction and treatment visit www.lifeormeth.org; www.tweaker.org; or contact Crystal Meth Anonymous (213) 488-4455 or www.crystal-meth.org.

Tara Lohan is a freelance writer and the editor of a queer newspaper. She lives in Northern New Mexico. She can be reached at tlohan@hotmail.com.



You CAN'T Take This Away From Us

words Maura Ryan
Illustration Jen Oaks

I gave a talk recently on the radical politics of the Lesbian Avengers on a panel about pop culture and feminist activism. In passing, I mentioned that they, like ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] and Queer Nation, took part in kiss-ins. I went on to explain: kiss-ins are actions in which same-sex couples gather in a public place and make out with each other; it's done to allow heterosexuals the opportunity to see something they rarely see (same-sex eroticism) and to force them to confront their homophobia(s). Nothing new to a gang of folks interested in women's studies, right? Everyone was going to agree with me, right?

The two other panel members and I stood in front of the room, poised for questions, as the first brave audience member raised her hand. I smiled. She had gray short hair and was wearing a comfortable-looking flannel-like button down shirt. She was probably in her mid to late 50s, the same age as my mother. As a femme dyke with a keen eye for these sorts of things, I can spot my own kind: this was not your everyday women's studies dress — this woman was a sapphic sister.

She leaned back in her chair, arms crossed forebodingly over her chest.

and asked, *Don't these people realize that maybe straight people don't want to think about gay people in a sexual way? That maybe gays and lesbians could get further if they went with saying that [straight people] probably have a friend or a co-worker or a brother who is gay?* I (trying not to grind my teeth) said, *Well, yes. People who practice conservative gay politics have used this strategy — the "somebody you love is gay" strategy. Activists, like the Avengers, though, would say that it's unfair that straight people want to de-sexualize us, that we must recognize that we aren't allowed to practice our sexuality the same way heterosexuals practice theirs (out in the open), and that the solution to the secrecy surrounding queer sexualities is to display them.*

I thought we were having a queer generation gap moment. In my head, she's the mythical political lesbian I've read about in books and heard jokes about on television. She thinks that focusing on the sexual aspects of lesbianism is male-identified/she hates me for being a femme dyke/she is resentful that young dykes have forgotten the model for organizing that women like her created. Of course women like that (for the most part) are caricatures painted by anti-feminist pundits who write the history books and create the cultural jokes. Many women her age participate in kiss-ins, fight for sex positivity, and (of course) identify as femme dykes. Unfortunately, I fell into the comfortable pattern of assuming that I understood all of her attitudes about being a lesbian from a few sentences and her grey hair.

Even though I don't always like that point of view, I reminded myself that she has a point. I firmly believe that a mixture of political strategies will help queer people attain civil rights and visibility. It's just that people who believe in sound political lobbying and take-straight-people-by-the-hand approaches generally think that radical ploys for attention are childish and ineffective. I ground my teeth for the loathsome things I thought she was thinking about me and my brand of activism.

Imagining that I must not yet have found the logic in what she was trying to communicate, she asked, *Well, as a young person, do you want to think about people your parents' age having sex?*

Doesn't that gross you out? It's just like — yuck, I don't want to think about it, isn't it?

When she first brought up not liking the idea of kiss-ins, I thought she was working her way through some internalized homophobia. On hearing her talk more, though, I began to see her as a victim of a much more troubling and pervasive cultural problem: the lie that we are only allowed to be sexual if other people want to watch us have sex.

Instead of finding value in each sexual self and recognizing sexual expression and activity as a central human need, too often people only feel worthy of having a sexuality if they compare reasonably well to the current beauty standard.

We all share one sexual imagination (reproduced in degrading magazine ads/late night talk show jokes/music videos with pubescent girls/movies that go to great lengths to deprive women of sexual agency) that establishes the sexually desirable and the sexual other. The sexual other has no right to experience or express her own sexuality; she must repress her desires because they make people uncomfortable. Our culture's solution is this: if you have a body or practice a sexuality that no one should be forced to think about, you're shamed into covering up or being quiet about it.

A young girl in the audience spoke up. She wanted to know if it's something that's done more by couples of men or couples of women; *Either way*, she said, *it's not like it's a bunch of Britney Spears girls out there, right?*

All oppressed people experience misuse of their sexuality in some way: men of color, working class men, and queer men are all characterized as hyper-sexual beings, while men with disabilities and many fat men are considered devoid of sexuality. This may have consequences in self-esteem for individual men, but the totalizing effects of the misuse(s) of sexuality are different for women because of sexism. (Exactly!) Men are immune to experiencing sexual othering the way women do because of the power they hold in the system of male privilege.

This is a product of the male gaze we learned about in Feminism 101: women do not view themselves through their own eyes. We imagine the way we are supposed to look, we focus on the details that make us other, and we hate

ourselves for every fold, wrinkle, or desire that's wrong. Some women are more vulnerable than others. Older women, fat women, women of color, women with disabilities, queer women, and working class women are especially prone to feel like the sexual other. If you're not as young as/thin as/white as/able-bodied as/straight as/rich-looking as Britney Spears, there's a ghost in your bedroom that reminds you of what a sexual being looks like (*and that you're not her*).

The agenda for the uses and representations of women's bodies and sexualities has always been set by someone other than individual women. Because of this, women internalize the sexual meanings in our culture, police ourselves to act in accordance with the rules, and punish ourselves when we don't add up. We know that someone else has always defined women's sexuality. What's key, here, is that our sexuality has always been defined as essential to our personhood. When we don't add up as correct sexual beings, we just don't add up.

Well, what would that be like? I pressed. *If a bunch of girls who looked like Britney Spears coupled off in public to make out — what would happen?* The girl who brought up Britney smiled, *Everyone would like it.*

I don't agree with her. Our cultural sexual imagination has created more than the lie that only conventionally attractive people are allowed to have sex; it also stipulates when the sexually desirable can have sex, how they should have it, and how much they should like it. Even the privileged women we're taught to envy have their sexuality used against them. Thin young white women are told with whom they may have sex, exactly how and how much, and they are not taught how to ensure their own sexual gratification.

Just as time was running out on the session, Jack, the tranny-boi who came with me to see me speak, said, *I don't know. If you think about it, the way our sexuality is used/misused/repressed or over-emphasized is the mark of an oppressed person. Really feminine women performing a public sex act would either be hated for being queer or hyper-sexualized by their audience.*

There are some groups of oppressed peoples who are never considered sexy in the popular imagination: women over

a certain age, fat people (particularly fat women), and people with disabilities. Other people, though, receive conflicting messages about their sexual worthiness. Women of color are at once desexualized and hyper-sexualized in their public portraits. They can be considered sexually desirable if they have the right skin color/hair texture/voice inflections/accents, but they are always measured to a white standard of beauty, and they must be thought of as accessible to white men. Same-sex images of women are ultimately desirable (in the pages of *Playboy*, *Penthouse* and the like) if the two women are not assumed to actually be queer, are both conventionally feminine, and are seen as performing the act (not enjoying it). Transgender women are also caught in the sexuality void/exploited sexuality rift. While trans women are not officially deemed the sexually desirable, large numbers of porn web sites and escort services cater to heterosexual men who find it forbiddingly erotic. Still, when women of color, images of queer women, or trans women are touted as fashionably erotic, it is only at the oppressor's whim.

Now, isn't it just like a queer girl to focus on sex as a key to liberation? To look at sexuality as the arena in which we're all oppressed? Of course the oppressed women I've talked about have varying levels of concern with job/house discrimination, health care coverage, street harassment, and violence (to name a few), but what I'm saying is that the performance of our sexuality is always necessarily connected to how privileged or oppressed we are. There's a strong relationship between white heterosexual male privilege and the ability to own your sexuality. The further we get from that paradigm, the further we get from sexual freedom.

It's time that we find out more about the ways intersecting oppressions create sexual repression for individuals; we need to have more conversations about the ways sexual agency is increasingly limited as women occupy multiple oppressed categories. It's time that oppressed peoples work on building whole sexual selves. My hope for the future of sex positivity is that we create a political goal of sexual freedom that is mindful of countless body and sexuality possibilities and that we define sexual freedom as the freedom to refrain, act, and express our bodies, sexual thoughts, and desires in any way we choose. ★

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Good Catholic Girls: How Women Are Leading the Fight to Change the Church

Angela Bonavoglia
Regan Books, 2005
www.harpercollins.com

Last Spring, Angela Bonavoglia had a modest media schedule in place to promote her book, *Good Catholic Girls: How Women are Leading the Fight to Change the Church*. But with the Pope's death coming weeks after the book's release, that changed. Major media, such as the Washington Times and CBS news, tapped Bonavoglia to share what she calls her "progressive agenda" for Church reform.

"I tried to feature women on the edge of the progressive movement in the Catholic church — women working to end the politics of sexual repression," said Bonavoglia from her home north of New York City.

A contributor to *Ms.*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Nation* and other publications, Bonavoglia's written often about women's issues and Church reform. She previously authored a book called *The Choices We Made: Twenty-five Women and Men Speak About Abortion*. She describes herself as a committed Catholic opposed to the Church's "demonization of sexuality, its arrogance, and its hypocrisy."

Bonavoglia says *Good Catholic Girls* was inspired by one of the women at the book's center, Sister Joan Chittister. "When I heard about Joan Chittister and the Erie Benedictines and how they took a stand together against an attempt by the Vatican to silence [Chittister], that marked a turning point in the response of Catholics to [John Paul's] papacy and the repression that had been characteristic of it."

Chittister is a Benedictine nun, author, lecturer and high profile advocate for the expansion of women's role in the Church. The "silencing attempt" Bonavoglia refers to occurred when Chittister—along with the backing of her entire Benedictine community in Erie, Pennsylvania—defied a Vatican order not to speak at a conference on women's ordination. The Vatican promised "grave penalties" for that act of defiance, but nothing came to pass — perhaps, suggests Bonavoglia, be-



cause Chittister's religious sisters stood with her. Bonavoglia also writes about Jeannine Gramick, another nun at odds with the Vatican. In the 70's, Gramick co-founded a gay/lesbian outreach ministry that was rebuked in the 90's and ultimately expelled from her religious community.. silenced by the CDF and Cardinal [Joseph] Ratzinger. He's been the nemesis of many of the women mentioned in my book... the voice of orthodoxy."

Cardinal Ratzinger, formerly head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and "the nemesis of many of the women mentioned in my book... the voice of orthodoxy," was elected Pope Benedict XVI to succeed John Paul. This doesn't sit well with Bonavoglia: "He's the nemesis not just of the women in my book but progressives in general. Back in the 90's when John Paul issued an encyclical on women's ordination, Ratzinger went even further by issuing his own encyclical on the subject and he tried to say his teaching was 'infallible.' That's ridiculous since only the Pope himself can invoke infallibility. He was also behind a recent letter concerning 'cooperation between women and men' that totally denounces feminism. He chastises women who 'seek liberation from biological determinism' and argues that this can be 'lethal to the family.' Those are quotes."

Bonavoglia says she fears the new Pope will be worse than John Paul in terms of "relegating women in the Church." Nonetheless, she says the many women profiled in her book give her hope: "When I asked these women why they remain Catholic, some of them said 'Because I believe in miracles.' That's the same reason I stay."

-Bill Frogameni

The first time this anarcha-feminist got pregnant, she also got a little confused. I knew that I didn't want to be pregnant. But I also knew that I didn't want to pay a wealthy, white, male doctor to perform an invasive and traumatic abortion procedure on me. I wanted to experience my abortion as an empowering event in my life rather than a shameful mistake, and I wanted to actually *experience* my abortion. I wanted a menstrual extraction — the least physically traumatic, least expensive, and, unfortunately, least legal form of early-term abortion that exists today.

For those of us unhappy with inviting chemicals or surgery into the abortion scene, menstrual extraction is an alternative option that can be safe, effective, and cheap. Developed in 1970 by feminist activists as an alternative to back-alley abortions, this underground technique has a rich revolutionary history that has somehow remained disappointingly absent from the struggle to reclaim reproductive rights. In a time when 87 percent of counties in the U.S. lack an abortion provider, according to the National Abortion Federation, menstrual extraction has the potential to provide a low-cost, early-term abortions across geographical, cultural, and economic borders. But, why hasn't anyone heard of it?

In one of the powerful social phenomena of the 1960s, thousands of women across the U.S. formed self-help groups and began to re-explore gynecological self care for the first time since the emergence of the professional medical establishment decimated our access to woman-controlled reproductive technology. These

women peeked at each other's cervixes, completed their own wellness exams, and in 1970 finally developed an abortion procedure that involved no drugs and no doctors.

Menstrual extraction mimics the vacuum aspiration method of abortion but can be performed safely by a trained layperson in a woman's home, without anesthesia or much medical equipment. The procedure is recommended only for early-term pregnancies, no further along than six to seven weeks.

The technique itself is shockingly simple, requiring equipment that can be found in a home kitchen and a scientific supply store for under \$100. A flexible plastic instrument with a rounded tip, called a cannula, is inserted into the vagina, through the cervix, and into the uterus. The cannula is attached to a length of aquarium tubing, which empties into a quart jar fitted with a rubber stopper. A second length of aquarium tubing leaves the jar, attaching to a plastic syringe. A two-way bypass valve prevents air from

REPRODUCTIVE

a brief history of menstrual extraction by Laurel Hara

SELF-CARE



entering the uterus while the syringe creates suction, and the contents of the uterus are safely and quickly extracted into the jar. It's quick, usually lasting 15-30 minutes, and the only pain is like experiencing a regular cycle worth of menstrual cramps all in just a few minutes. The pain is bearable. There's no anesthesia necessary, no painful and traumatic dilation of the cervix, and no sharp metal instruments involved.

When it was developed, menstrual extraction presented an unparalleled level of effectiveness and physical safety for millions of women, when compared to the alternative of a "back alley" abortion. Women flocked to early demonstrations of the technique in 1971, and soon Los Angeles' feminist activists took to the road, sharing menstrual extraction with women across the country. The popularity of women's self-help groups soared, and a strong underground network of menstrual extraction practitioners — almost all female — developed. The new technique succeeded in regenerating fervor for women-controlled reproductive health care, and the struggle for the legalization of abortion continued.

Despite the amazing step forward that menstrual extraction provided for women's access to abortion, the momentum surrounding it slowed almost to a halt with the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Women in the U.S. were granted the legal right to have an abortion — that is, the legal right to obtain a socially acceptable form of abortion, provided only by a doctor, for a price. *Roe v. Wade* left menstrual extraction in the dust because the legalization of abortion didn't apply to this underground technique. "In those places where abortion became accessible and inexpensive," due to legalization, "menstrual extraction, quite naturally, lost popularity," stated Lorraine Rothman, the technique's

key pioneer. Women returned to a dependence on surgical abortions provided by the for-profit medical profession, and feminist activists turned their attention to the establishment of legal abortion clinics, relegating menstrual extraction to a place in the history of the feminist movement.

A resurgence of interest in menstrual extraction is well documented in media archives from the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the Supreme Court's *Webster* decision granted states new power to restrict abortion. Articles in every major U.S. newspaper and news magazine profiled a renewed concern among women regarding menstrual extraction as a safeguard against the recriminalization of abortion. In 1989, Lorraine Rothman and the Federation of Feminist Women's Health Centers (FFWHC) produced the film "No Going Back," an instructional guide to performing a menstrual extraction. FFWHC activists again traveled the country, doing demonstrations of the technique and marketing menstrual extraction kits for \$90. The resource guide *A Woman's Book of Choices: Abortion, Menstrual Extraction, RU-486* was published in 1992 by Rebecca Chalker and Carol Downer, and remains the only widely available resource on the technique.

"There is a resurgence of women digging out their menstrual extraction kits," and remembering why they had them in the first place, Rothman stated in 1991. Menstrual extraction had reached a point of being publicly acknowledged and thus somewhat legitimized. Carol Downer cited the existence of approximately 2000 menstrual extraction practitioners in the U.S. in 1992 — a significant number in consideration of the truly grassroots beginning and clandestine nature of menstrual extraction.

That was the last time menstrual extraction appeared in the public spotlight. Underground, the body of knowledge surrounding menstrual extraction still exists. So do networks of experienced women who've been performing them for 30 years, — but these practitioners are few and far between. It's amazing how many anarchy-feminists and reproductive rights activists have never heard of this technique that has the potential to change the way women experience abortion. It's amazing that in 2002 — almost 30 years after the legalization of abortion — I found myself making a secret phone call and using code words to obtain an abortion. *Roe v. Wade* may have granted women the legal right to obtain publicly acceptable forms of abortion, but it didn't grant me access to the low-tech, empowering abortion I wanted.

The current political climate in the U.S. places the future of legal abortion in the U.S. in danger, and many concerned women anticipate a battle against the Bush administration in the not-so-distant future. Feminist communities across the country are beginning to recognize the need to arm themselves with options and the need to "take up the cannula" as a way of "taking up arms," as suggested by Lynne Randall, former director of the Atlanta Feminist Women's Health Center. Once again, menstrual extraction may very well become a visible act of resistance to the recriminalization of abortion. Until then, it maintains the potential to serve as an accessible, empowering, and safe alternative to conventional abortion, and it provides every woman the opportunity to use her abortion as a step toward reclaiming the skills and the technology of her reproductive heritage. ★

Lanrel Hara & her partner are members of The Confluence Collective in Grand Junction, Colorado. She's also a student at the Institute for Social Ecology, studying feminist reproductive health perspectives & community organizing. For more info on menstrual extraction, contact her at kohlspenny@yahoo.com.

We are women whose ultimate goal is the liberation of women in society. One important way we are working toward that goal is by helping any woman who wants an abortion to get one as safely and cheaply as possible under existing conditions. — Jane pamphlet, 1969-1973

Jane began in the late 1960s when Heather Booth, a student activist at the University of Chicago, was asked by a friend to help him find a safe abortion provider for his sister. Heather rapidly gained a reputation as a go-to person for competent abortion care, operating an informal counseling and referral service for women in need of illegal abortions and providers who were known to do good work. When the number of calls grew beyond her own capacity, she and other women organized the "Abortion Counseling Service," publicizing their service through a newspaper ad: "Pregnant? Don't want to be? Call Jane. 643-3844."

In 1969, the Abortion Counseling Service joined forces with the socialist-feminist umbrella organization, The Chicago Women's Liberation Union. By this time, the women of Jane had also learned and begun performing abortion procedures themselves, charging a "can-pay" fee that allowed them to provide safe, humane pregnancy terminations for even the poorest women in Chicago. By 1972, Jane had performed over 12,000 illegal abortions with a rate of safety comparable to that of hospital practices in California and New York. A police raid on May 3, 1972 resulted in the arrest of seven Jane women; the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision released the "Abortion Seven" from charges before they could go to trial. Jane disbanded in 1973, with many former members going on to start other feminist health projects in Chicago and other parts of the United States.

—Laura Jones

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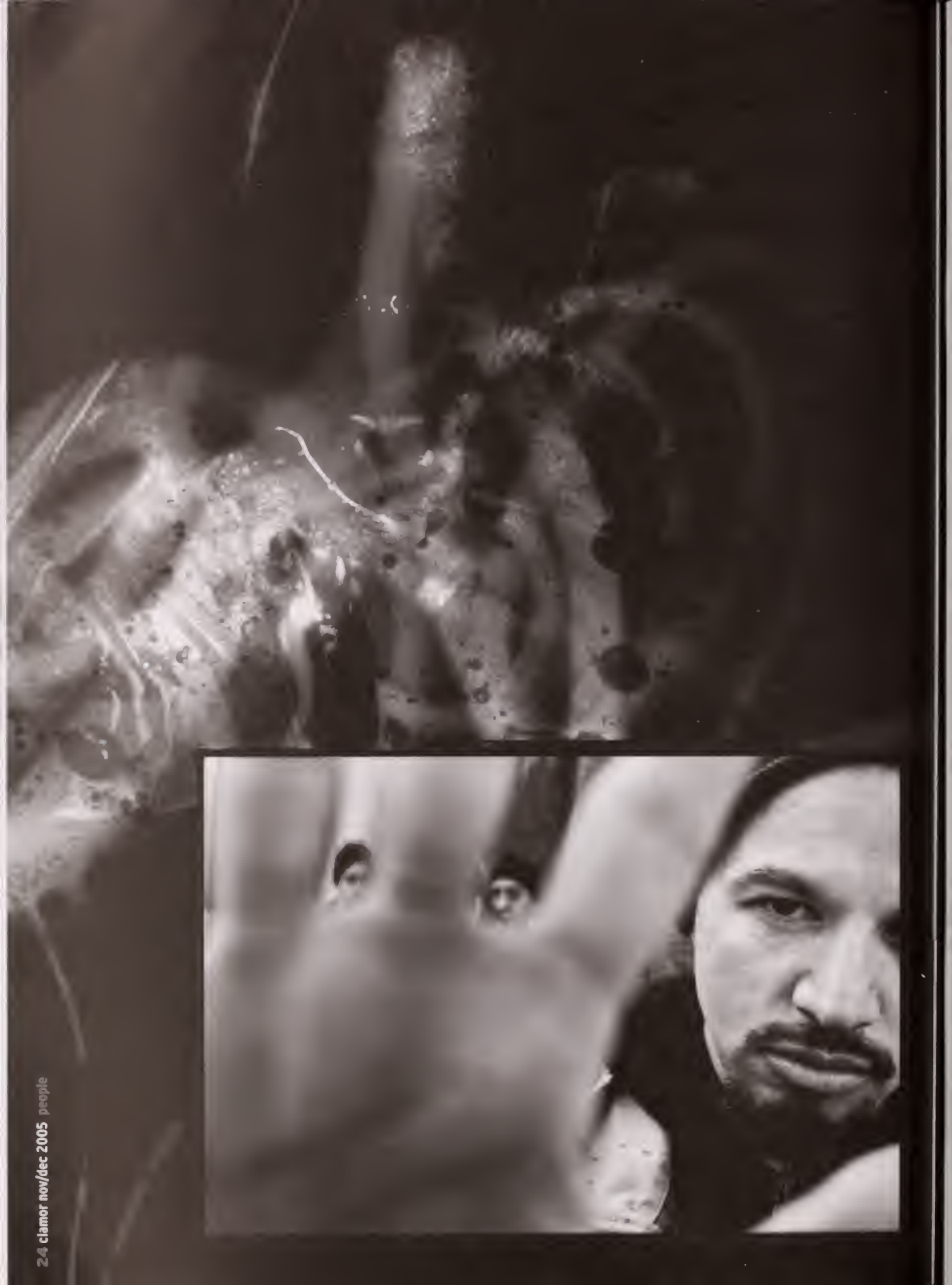
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BURNING DOWN BABYLON

AN INTERVIEW WITH
RICANSTRUCTION'S
NOT4PROPHET

interview Ari Paul

photos Sam LaHoz | slny.net

Crossing over from the sea of wealth that is Manhattan's Upper East Side into Spanish Harlem (or East Harlem), you can see the contrasts New York's Ricanstruction — a Puerto Rican punk/Afro-Latin beat band — have experienced. The ghetto attributes abound: Soviet-style public housing, malt-liquor bottles on the street, an excessive NYPD presence. This Puerto Rican and African American neighborhood is one marked by resistance, insists Not4Prophet, Ricanstruction's lead vocalist. Everything from the political graffiti to the murals of Che Guevara to the community gardens exudes both resistance and autonomy.

Ricanstruction hesitates to classify itself; Not4Prophet doesn't even like to use the word "anarchist" to describe the band's politics. Songs like "Mad Like Farrakhan" and "Bulletproof" bring Latin beats (and political experience) to fast-paced vocals and guitar riffs. Slower, darker rhythms in songs like "Abu-Jamal" (about American political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal) feel more like the finale of a tragic opera with Not4Prophet's pleading tone, often inspired by Bob Marley as much as Jello Biafra.

While failing — thankfully — to fall into the rock-rap genre that gave us Rage Against the Machine or 311, Not4Prophet's love of hip hop is essential to the band's ability to fuse the resistance culture of white anarchist punks and his own Spanish Harlem community. Their latest release, *Love + Revolution* (Uprising Records), includes appearances from hip hop icons such as Dead Prez and Chuck D from Public Enemy. The band members are still active artistically and politically on their home turf.

As of late the band has grown in numbers as well as in its means of expression. Formerly a four-piece, the band has picked up Taina of Anti-Product as an additional vocalist. And along with the filmmaker Vagabond, Ricanstruction's members and music have appeared in several short political films. Their recent feature film, *Machetero*, starring Not4Prophet and Isaac De Bankole (*Ghost Dog*, *Coffee and Cigarettes*), has already been shown on the West Coast, in Canada, and in New York.

Not4Prophet came to the United States from Puerto Rico when he was five years old. As a non-English-speaker in his new country, he was referred to remedial education, an experience he found condescending and now sees as an all-too-familiar part of the immigrant experience. Raised by Puerto Rican nationalists, he was pushed to rebellion after witnessing the destruction of lives by cops, poverty, and drugs in his community. He started sneaking into CBGB when he was 12 years old and began adding bands like the Clash and Dead Kennedys to his musical and political repertoire. This mixture eventually created the band's mission of encouraging the tradition of resistance in East Harlem and bringing that experience to the New York punk scene.

You described Ricanstruction as forming organically. What do you mean by that?

Not4Prophet: Basically, it was cats on the street [that] were just kind of around. A lot of us were graffiti writers. We didn't necessarily look at it as a political act, even though it is a political act. It was just for voiceless people trying to get their names known. But as we became a little more aware, we tried to figure out what things we could do to battle or resist the system. Then our graffiti started to become a little more politicized.

But a lot of people weren't graffiti writers. And that's when people started discovering their talents: People could play instruments, and then there's a band.

It was just something that came about, because we didn't have any political power, we didn't own or control anything. All we had was — for lack of a better [term] — our natural abilities.

When and how did you guys have a political awakening?

It's a funny question. As Puerto Ricans or as minorities, your life is political from the jump. You don't have a political awakening, but it happens for different people for different reasons.

The moms of the cats who get killed by cops, those moms may not have thought they were political and next thing you know they're activists. So for everybody it's their own thing. For me, walking down the street every day, cops are stopping me just because I fit a de-

scription. One day you realize, "Okay, this is all political." And you start figuring out what you can do about it or you don't, but you're still confronted with a political situation.

There's the concept that punk is very white music. For you to have entered that scene what has it been like — or do you not agree with that?

I grew up listening to hip hop, so that was our music. And that was . . . music of rebellion, and punk was also music of rebellion but for a different group of people, which tended to be white. But, I mean, the first punk bands that I liked weren't white. Bad Brains, Black Flag had tons of Latinos in the band — the Adolescents, or Dead Kennedys. And those were the bands I was listening to, not because they had people of color in them, but because I happened to like those. So, I personally never saw punk as white, but I do understand that it is, compared to hip hop, white music.

We've never thought of ourselves as a subculture. As Puerto Ricans we were already a counter-culture. Any time you stand up against the system, in any real way, you cease to be a subculture people can ignore and you become a counter-culture. I think for me the problem I always had with punk as we know it is that it tends to be a subculture and it tends to not embrace other aspects of struggle politics.

You get these subcultures where people say "this is pure punk." Yeah, but right now you sound like Good Charlotte, so what threat is there to the system if the system can co-opt you based on your sound?

My definition of punk is something that is going toe-to-toe to try to dismantle and eventually destroy a system. If you're saying, "No, no, no, we work outside the system and we live off the grid," then you're not doing anything to dismantle or destroy the system. Maybe in some ways you're disrupting the system.

For us, we've always wanted to free Puerto Rico, with the understanding that eventually we free everyone else. But I think a lot of punks create these little ciphers for themselves, and they're fine with the fact that, "Oh, I'm not corporate!" We got called punk because we've always been DIY and anti-corporate. We

are whatever you want us to be as long as you understand that what we are is something that is trying to thwart this system.

So when you take the stage at CBGB — in addition to working with artists like Dead Prez and Chuck D — do you ever feel like you confuse people?

Most of our base has been anarcho-punks. And they know that they have to create coalitions with others. Dead Prez is on a corporate label. But there's the understanding, the question we ask ourselves: "Why does Dead Prez feel the need to be on a major label? Why did Public Enemy? Or Rage Against the Machine?"

I think a lot of punks get into that "punker than thou" thing. They say, "Oh, they're sell-outs!" I say, "Maybe they are sell-outs. Find out why." Why do disenfranchised people or so-called minorities feel the need to deal with the corporations? Why do they feel the need to use inexpensive housing given to them by the city rather than squatting?

We — as minorities — know that the system has been created to either destroy us or make us part of the apparatus that runs the machine, whether it's cleaning toilets or working behind the counter at McDonald's. That's what we exist for in the capitalist system. We don't have the liberty to be all crazy and pretend like we can do whatever we want. We have to be more methodical and we have to be revolutionary and have more of a concept of what that entails before we do anything.

You want to replace the system?

We're not trying to replace anything. Let Ari be Ari, let Not4Prophet be Not4Prophet. People here in East Harlem don't consider themselves anarchists, but there are tons of people in this community who feed and clothe each other. They see a cat on the street with no place to live and they bring them in. People want to call that anarchism because somebody named it. I personally feel it is instinctive.

And that's how people in most of these communities live until the forces of evil come in and say, "No, this is what you're supposed to do. You're supposed to work for me. You're not supposed to support your brother or your sister."

Is East Harlem, or any other place that you've lived, self-reliant or autonomous?

Less and less. My parents weren't anarchists; they were Puerto Rican nationalists. Because of the fact that they were here, and not only the U.S. government having problems with them being nationalists, but other Puerto Ricans who were like, "Oh, you guys are scary. I agree with what you're saying but I don't agree with you on political tactics." So they had no choice as nationalists but to create these little autonomous communities. They had collectives where they would all live together. That's how they lived and they didn't call it anarchism. They didn't call it nationalism either. They called it survival.

And that's another thing, when we talk about squatting. There's a squatters' movement and there's *squatters*. Squatters are people who don't have a place to live and would be homeless. They don't wave the squatters' flag, or any flag, they just need a place to live. Because if you're Puerto Rican or African American and you wave your squatters' flag, then you're out of there and in prison the next day.

There's always been autonomous communities around here, but it's harder, because if you walk around East Harlem, especially at night, you'll see a cop car on every corner. That's a real challenge. And there's a McDonald's and a Wendy's. And they replace the *bodega*. It's still New York; it's still the United States.

Could you talk about your new movie, Machetero?

It's about the liberation of Puerto Rico from the perspective of a cat who is basically saying, "I want to liberate Puerto Rico but I want to liberate myself and I want to liberate everybody." So he's this ideal ideology of freedom.

We've used the music of Ricanstruction to tell the story. On the one hand, it's our way of talking about ideas we have as — for lack of a better word — anarcho-independistas. On the other hand, it's a way to talk to our community about ideas that are not so specifically nationalist in the way people think of Puerto Rican nationalism, because it's always been socialist. So we're injecting ideas of — for lack of a better word — anarchism. We want to make it a natural and

organic thing, not us saying, "Hey, we're anarchists and this is what we're about."

How do you describe the Puerto Rican experience in relation to the United States?

We're the only colonial subjects. There are a lot of neo-colonial subjects in this country, but our experience for over 500 years has been strictly a colonial commission.

Pedro Campos, the nationalist leader, once said the U.S. wants the birdcage without the bird. This country could do quite well without having Puerto Ricans, but it's the island that's of value. Whether it's as a strategic military location to watch the rest of Latin America, or the fact that the U.S. has nuclear missiles in Puerto Rico, one of the problems nationalists have always talked about is the fact that if somebody was going to go toe-to-toe with the U.S. and they had nuclear missiles of their own, one of the first targets would have to be Puerto Rico — even though we have no military.

By the same token, in disproportionate numbers we have been fighting in U.S. wars since World War I. We were made U.S. citizens in 1917 and then sent off to fight in Europe and then it happened again and again. We don't have a say-so in that. Bush is not our president. We're not allowed to vote.

The only other U.S. citizens besides us who can't vote are felons. That's a phenomenon no immigrant has to expe-

Any time you stand up against the system, in any real way, you cease to be a subculture people can ignore and you become a counter-culture. I think for me the problem I always had with punk as we know it is that it tends to be a subculture and it tends to not embrace other aspects of struggle politics.



rience because once they become American citizens they get to vote.

I only speak Spanish to people who don't speak English, like my parents. I never really cared that much about Spanish any more than English because they were both colonial languages that were forced on us. But at the state we're in now, you come to realize even Spanish becomes an act of resistance for us. The U.S. tried to make English the official language of Puerto Rico. And the people fought it. In the court of law in Puerto Rico, the spoken language is English. ☆

Ari Paul has also written for In These Times, Z, Time Out Chicago, and Citizen Culture. Reach Ari care of Clamor.



MOVING THROUGH SPACES IN A STRATIFIED WORLD

People cross borders so infrequently that “Where are you from?” has all but taken the place of “Nice to meet you” in my experience over the past year. “Luòshanji,” I’ll answer, or “Los Angeles” if I’m asked in English. Two or three times, however, I’ve run into somebody who knows the diversity that is L.A. To them I say I’m from “the Eastside,” still a vague answer but one that distinctly does *not* carry the connotations of wealth and luxury that its western counterpart does. That answer encompasses only the four years I spent earning my bachelor’s degree at a predominately Latino, working-class state school prior to moving to China’s Suzhou — a city rich with foreign investment) most companies taking advantage of low labor costs) an hour outside the nation’s economic pride and joy, Shanghai.¹

WORDS Jennifer Ashley

East L.A., 2001 — *The first time I get on a bus in L.A., I feel like everybody is staring at me. I feel like I don’t belong. Over the next few years, I log in plenty of hours waiting for buses. Later I don’t feel like anyone even notices me. Since I moved out of my parents’ house upon graduating high school, I’ve refused their financial assistance. I’m (barely) able to afford this largely due to the full academic scholarship I’ve been awarded. But it has meant a stark change in lifestyle, beyond the buses: Walking home one evening during the 2003 bus strike, I see the coroner’s van near a vacant lot, loading a body. One night a gun is pointed at me as I near my apartment. Such goings-on just don’t seem to happen on my parents’ side of town, while, according to my classmates, they’re pretty commonplace here.*

The big skeleton in my closet is that I spent eight years as a pre-teen and teenager in Malibu, California, accurately described on the back of a postcard in the local Sav-On as “Home of the rich and playground of the famous.” My high-school graduation featured a handful of Latino students (most, children of live-in domestic workers), a few African American students, three half-Asians (of which I was one), and, mostly, a whole ton of white folk. Ever since I moved from Malibu, I’ve avoided confessing any connection to it.

But in China, this is insignificant. Due to my Caucasian features, I am viewed as *wàiguórén*, literally “outside-country person.” It’s common knowledge in China that all *wàiguórén*

are wealthy. Though I'm neither a U.S.-salaried, uprooted expatriate nor an affluent vacationer, at US\$623 a month, I am indeed making two to three times what my Chinese coworkers (recent graduates with IT degrees) earn and five times the average income for people in Jiangsu province—one of the wealthiest in China.

Then & Now — *No matter where I say I'm from, I feel like people are going to form some kind of judgment. I hate being labeled a rich white kid.*

Through the Looking Glass

When I told people I was moving to China, some responded in horror and disbelief. That's a communist country, they'd say with disdain. I grew up listening to my mother's accounts of her childhood in a mud hut in a rural village in 1950s southern China and how she snuck on the bottom of a boat to escape to Hong Kong. I haven't seen any mud huts, and most of my peers here who want to go abroad want to return afterward.

Malibu, 1997 — *I am sitting at a table in front of my 10th -grade world history class. We are, on the whole, the privileged offspring of obscenely rich folk. I am in front of the class along with three classmates to present our debate on the topic of "Capitalism vs. Communism." (Eight years later, I'm still angry at this teacher for the embarrassment I feel over the "debate" I subsequently engage in.) I have only the fuzzy idea that "capitalism" means that people who work hard get what they want. When an opposing classmate accuses capitalists of being "greedy," my immediate (and, in fact, only) rebuttal is, "So?"*

Having lived in Suzhou a year, I'm confused about communism as an economic system and how it functions in China. Namely, I don't see that it does. The Chinese I am able to discuss this issue with seem happy to embrace capitalism and its ideals, but, with my limited Mandarin, maybe I'm not talking to the right people. Nor are my observations anywhere near comprehensive: I've really only seen the wealthy East coast and ignored the (rural) vast majority of the nation.

Suzhou, 2004 — *When I ask my Chinese coworkers what they do on the weekends, they tell me, "Shopping!" It repulses me at first, but then again, I remember many weekends in the back seat, circling around American shopping-mall parking lots, waiting for a vacant space.*

In the United States, 45 percent of my fellow 2004 college graduates have moved back to their parents' houses and are still living there, according to a Monstertrak.com article.² Before I left, I had one job prospect. It paid \$1,900 a month. Most likely I would have stayed in my \$550/month room and continued relying on public transportation. Maybe I would have opened a savings account, something I was never able to do when I had a monthly net income of \$1,100 as a student. Did I come to China because it was the most financially feasible option?

Here & There — *In China, I see entire families living in single concrete rooms, sometimes right across the street from new, shiny shopping centers. In the more segregated United States, these kinds of contrasts aren't usually visible, but, according to Habitat for Humanity, at least 5.1 million Americans live in housing with "severe physical deficiencies" such as lack of hot water, electricity, or a toilet.³*

If It's Good Enough for Them ...

How much is enough to live a "nice, but not opulent" life? A Forbes.com article asks this question and answers it, too: an average \$370,000 a year after taxes on the West Coast of the U.S., it says, which should cover "private schools for the kids, a large house in an upscale neighborhood, a weekend retreat, a pricey night out once a week, [and] a couple of very nice cars."⁴

Everybody just wants to have a nice life. At the same time, that nice life is growing and always escaping our grasp.

Suzhou, 2004 — *In my inbox, there is an e-mail from my ex-boyfriend. It announces that he has purchased the very same Honda Accord that my father purchased a few months ago. My ex-boyfriend seems proud of the fact that he, a 24-year-old escapee/refugee/immigrant (in that order) from, in his words, "a Third-World country," owns the same car as a 50-something white, male retiree. He also doesn't seem to mind the \$60,000 debt he's accrued in exchange for a couple of degrees, a \$1,000 TAG Heuer watch, daily dining out, and quite a few nights of elite clubbing. One of his handfuls of maxed-out credit cards is that way because of a loan he made to his family in Vietnam for an investment that went belly-up.*

Final Destinations and Beyond

So there's this ex-boyfriend, my mother. And a whole lot of others like them. They both came from communist countries in the east and went west and, though their spending/lending habits are quite different, both bought into the capitalist dream. And now there's me, making that trip in reverse, leaving the land of consumerism only to arrive in another. Yeah, "Westernization" and "new colonialism" are playing a role here, but there's much more overlap than these labels suggest.

International travel is commonplace today, but we don't necessarily need passports to cross borders. Imbalances and segregation are visible from within and from without. Crossing national or neighborhood or lifestyle borders all reveal varying perceptions of what's necessary and what's extravagant. As I age and move through different spaces and lifestyles, I've come to realize that even my own perceptions aren't static. I don't know what they'll become as I continue to move. ★

Jennifer Ashley is not sure where home is anymore. Say hi to her, wherever she is, at voodikou@yahoo.com.

How much is enough to live a "nice, but not opulent" life?

¹ There has been much talk among the Chinese and economists about whether Shanghai will surpass Hong Kong to become the nation's economic hub. With Shanghai's economic growth having been in the double digits—and increasing—for decades, the question has become less "if" and more "when."

² Vogt, Peter. "Jobs Outlook for '05 Grads Remains Bright." <http://content.monstertrak.monster.com/resources/archive/jobhunt/outlook05/>

³ <http://www.habitat.org/how/stats.aspx>

⁴ Clemence, Sara. "What It Costs to Live Well: West." July 7, 2005. http://www.forbes.com/lifestyle/2005/07/07/realestate-livingwell-west-cx_sc_0708home_ls.html



conversations with Dean Spade

INSECURITY CULTURE

“If I have to accept binaries, I’m more excited about excess,” began Dean Spade when I asked him to talk about excess and scarcity. “To me,” he continued, “capitalism is marked by a strong belief in scarcity. Its central strategy is to keep us all feeling insecure. We believe in our own inadequacy so we buy products to make us better. We feel financially insecure, that there can never be enough, that we always might lose it all. So everyone hoards their wealth and no one identifies themselves as having too much or being rich. We are constantly convinced of our national insecurity.”

Interview Izzy Klatzker a.k.a. Socket

Dean Spade is a founder, collective member, and attorney at the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP), a collective organization that works to guarantee that all people are free to self-determine their gender identity and expression, regardless of income or race, and without facing harassment, discrimination, or violence. Dean is also a writer. Insightful, passionate, and responsive, his essays range in topic and style, from looks at personal-life quandaries to political analysis to making your own cheese. Many of his works have been published in *Make*, a zine Dean coedits with Craig Willse that “ride[s] a rickety skateboard between queer desires for social and economic justice, critical thought on anti-racism and poverty, and a belief in DIY political insubordination.”

Dean and I recently discussed wealth, poverty, self-analysis as an activist tool, and more. Our interview was not linear, but rather occurred in sections and multiple mediums (phone and e-mail), as I live in rural Tennessee at a queer, sustainable-living commune where goats are much easier to access than computers and telephone connection depends on weather conditions. One theme

I particularly appreciated in our discussions was hope. At times we went judgmental; at others, empathic. A sense of nihilism peeked its head once or twice. But what I felt triumphed was the ability to imagine beyond what is put in front of us. We both strongly believe that people are expansive, whether it be through gender identity, dismantling socializations, or non-compliance with hegemonic norms. We agreed that folks can and just might exceed the options offered by the dominant culture and can manifest a world where excess stops being directed, where we empower ourselves on where and what to exceed.

I'm interested in your thoughts on the challenges of actually and conceptually approaching the redistribution of wealth and how we can be strategic about redistribution.

I think that one significant challenge for people I meet in the U.S. who aren't poor is understanding our place in the national and global economy. It is hard to understand what it means to redistribute wealth when our conceptions of what wealth is, who has it, why they have it, and what we need and don't need are exceptionally skewed by capitalism. On a personal level, we have to ask ourselves questions like, How much money should I keep and how much should I give away? How much should I spend on food, rent, etc.? What kinds of wages do I believe are reasonable for living but don't constitute hoarding wealth? I think most people avoid these questions altogether because they are painful and hard, and many people identify as "poor" or "middle class" when in reality, on a national and global scale, they are rich.

It makes sense that we can't comprehend our own wealth when we're inundated with images of excessive wealth constantly — the norm for television characters is exceptionally high-income. Capitalism trains us all to always look upward and compare ourselves to people wealthier than us and feel insecure rather than to recognize what we have and examine whether we have too much. I think a significant personal step that many people I meet when I visit colleges or speak with other professionals need to do is examine our own position in the economy honestly. The next step is to resist the

feelings of guilt that may come from recognizing economic privilege and instead tap into the specific potential we have for redistributing wealth — our own, and that of people we went to college with or have access to for other reasons related to privilege.

You said recently that you're tired of being diplomatic about poverty. Can you expand on that?

Sometimes I'm so overwhelmed, especially sitting around my office during our case rounds, with the incredible complexity and violence of the systems that poor people have to go through to get the basics of Medicaid, public assistance, immigration status, shelter, or education. It's amazing that it isn't represented anywhere, and people who don't go through it know nothing about it. We're inundated by media with detailed accounts of rich people and their problems and how they live their lives and what they go through, but this whole way of living is totally hidden. And because I work on redistributing wealth and power, part of my job is always going to be bridging that gap in understanding, and finding ways to help rich people see that capitalism is failing everyone and that we're all capable of refusing to maintain it. This requires a lot of compassion and diplomacy and it can be hard to figure out where to place the rage and resentment.

One place might be the culture, instead of individuals. You've written and talked a lot about this culture's invention of needs. How do those invented needs affect existing needs?

As you know, I'm semi-obsessed with the advent of the cell phone and the very recent but ubiquitous invention of the need for it. It is amazing to me that in such a short period so many people have become convinced that they need this thing that everyone lived and worked and socialized without in very recent memory. People are astounded that I don't have one (sometimes angry, as if I'm being irresponsible), and often guiltily confess, "I just gave in and got one a year ago." I recently heard that over one million cell phones are thrown out every year. With new need comes a wide range of new waste. I think about it on the micro level

too. If 20 of my friends are now spending \$40/month that they used to not spend, in a year we could have raised almost \$10,000. We could have paid the rent of a homeless person for a year, hired a part-time staffer for a non-profit doing essential work, helped dozens of people with medication costs, etc.

What interests me most about new needs is how insidious they are, how people can suddenly experience something as essential that is actually a luxury. I think that if we are committed to redistribution of wealth and opposing the consumerism that helps capitalism thrive, we need to have an analysis of how this is playing out in our activist cultures. What does it mean when we plan actions that require cell phones to participate (especially in an era of surveillance where cell phones have been used by the Israeli govern-

What interests me most about new needs is how insidious they are, how people can suddenly experience something as essential that is actually a luxury ... if we are committed to redistribution of wealth and opposing the consumerism that helps capitalism thrive, we need to have an analysis of how this is playing out in our activist cultures.

ment to pinpoint the locations of Palestinian activists for assassination)? What does it mean when we cultivate an activist culture that attaches the same kinds of "coolness" value to fashion, accessories, and electronics (iPod, anyone?) as the deadly capitalist culture we profess to detest. I'm not interested in vilifying one product or another specifically, or creating rules about what is okay or not okay, but rather in building a shared analysis that we can use to do some de-clouding when possible of our judgment about how we use money.

Another thing we've talked about is thinking critically about concepts of scarcity and insecurity as they relate to radical activist culture in particular —

One thing I've been talking to Craig [Willse] a lot about lately is stigma in activist settings. And gossip. We trash-talk about each other so much, and so much of it is about proving that people are or are not "fucked up." This constant labeling that goes on prevents any notion of growth and change from being meaningful between us, undermines our belief in political education, and destroys the trust we need in our work. I think scarcity and insecurity underlie this dynamic. We're all full of poisonous sexist, racist, transphobic, xenophobic, ableist, ageist, looksist thoughts, and we're all terrified of being found out. One of the ways we secure ourselves is to demonstrate our right-on political analysis by picking other people apart. I think it is essential to name oppressive dynamics when they occur, but I'm wondering how we can do that from a place of compassion that supports people and organizations in growing and increasing their capacity rather than stigmatizing and isolating them.

It reminds me of our culture's punitive approach to "crime": Someone does something wrong and they are a criminal and should be put away, rather than if someone does something that is hurtful to someone else, we should assume they, like everyone, are trying their best, and get to the root causes of the behavior and address them. I know that when someone acts out their transphobia, I don't want to have to educate them or be compassionate in that moment, but I think that we as communities of activists have the capacity to hear those stories and think about supporting each other in growth rather than catching the momentary thrill of talking shit and feeling above someone else. We're steeped in hierarchy, in a notion of self-worth based on being over and above something or someone, but that is not a sustainable vision for a world we want to live in where everyone has the chance to unlearn oppression.

How might our notions of "excess" look in that world, as opposed to in this one?

...When I think about excess, I always think about how the great thing about

these unworkable identity categories we're offered as our only options is that we all exceed them. I see this whenever I go back home, and conservative relatives and foster-relatives and neighbors pull me aside to tell me — a safe always-weirder person — their secrets. Their secret sexual desires, secret criticism of the president, secret thought about the war. They all have this excess that can't fit into the straight, Southern, right-wing, Christian identities they are very successfully portraying. We all have desires, hopes, and tendencies, characteristics that exceed systems of coercion, and within that excess lies the potential for de-regulating ourselves. That is what the word "excess" makes me think about, how we can imagine a world where the excess stops being managed or erased like facial hair on women or sexual secrets of celebrities, and starts being a basis for everyone's investment in creating a different type of existence. ★

Izzy Klatzker a.k.a. Socket's work (which is usually about being queer, subversive, sexy, and rural) has been featured in Sling-shot, LOUDmouth and various other zines, newsletters, and mischievous media.



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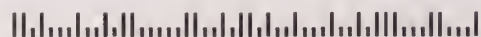
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Google Noose

new developments at the Google compound
threaten to stifle independent news sources
while bolstering McNews giants

words **Brian Dominick**

Ingenious innovations are not always good ideas, at least in the long run, and corporations can typically be found at the forefront along the path to ironic counter-productivity. Early adoption of cellular technology saddled the US with an expensive, clumsy mobile phone system inferior to those employed throughout Europe and much of the Third World. High-speed Internet over TV cable or enhanced telephone wires gave way to monopoly dependence that left our broadband access far slower and many times as expensive as that available in most other countries.

Likewise, as consolidation of Internet technologies continues and intellectual property claims become more pervasive, the relatively level playing field once promised by the so-called "Information Superhighway" remains at once elusive and threatened.

One recent revelation has independent online news publishers cringing for fear of losing one of the only equalizing forces capable of bringing mainstream attention to otherwise marginalized voices.

Promising Progress

It shouldn't seem particularly ironic that when a revolutionary idea — say one that makes web searches fundamentally faster, more useful and more powerful — thrusts a couple of regular geeks clean through the atmosphere of success, the corporate behemoth their good fortune inevitably spawns would turn sinister before too long. But whether our response to such a development takes the form of surprise, disappointment or "I told you so," the apparent trajectory of Google from mythic cottage project to Microsoft-esque corporate monster is portentous indeed — and it is very real.

It is not at all clear that Google — the company or its much-revered search engine — was ever something to admire

on principle like so many truly independent marvels of modern software such as early Linux incarnations and the more recent Mozilla Firefox browser. Relatively noncommercial, open-source projects like these are not only technologically advanced by comparison to their profit-driven rivals; they represent a politically and economically desirable alternative to the corporate method.

But nothing compares to the staggering growth of Google — the technology and the company — which has achieved an unmatched popularity, evidenced by its dominance of the search engine market and the household-verb status of the company's very name.

In 2003, Google launched a public model of its online news aggregator service, which collects headlines from and presents well-organized links to a reported 4,500 news and commentary sites. Champions of independent media couldn't help but celebrate. The folks at Google had created a "spider" program that "crawls" and "scrapes" the content of all those news outlets, indexing every word of every item they publish and collecting all the results together in one big archive for all the world to search and browse, free of charge.

As far as anyone assumed until recently, when a user searched that archive using her or his web browser, the results Google found would come back prioritized by the relative relevance of each news item to the search words, by the date the items were published, or by a combination of those criteria.

Google has been fairly open when deciding what "news" sites to index. Lots of small, non-corporate sites — left and right alike — not only have a presence in the Google News index, but they often appear prominently in search results. Finding stories from AlterNet, Infoshop.org, ZNet and lots of other progressive and radical sites mixed in with the *New York Times* and CNN is not uncommon. Sometimes you will even find links to stories on Common Dreams and Rabble.ca ranked more prominently than their counterparts on Reuters and Fox News covering the same subject.

The explanation for this fairly unique approach to gathering and presenting the news is described in essentially idealistic terms on the company's "About Google News" page:

Google News is a highly unusual news service in that our results are compiled solely by computer algorithms, without human intervention. As a result, news sources are selected without regard to political viewpoint or ideology, enabling you to see how different news organizations are reporting the same story. This variety of perspectives and approaches is unique among online news sites, and we consider it essential in helping you stay informed about the issues that matter most to you.

Unfortunately, any moment now, that level playing field may receive a drastic tilt in favor of the corporate giants.

About Face

In April, *New Scientist* magazine revealed that in 2003 Google filed for a patent on what it calls "systems and methods for improving the ranking of news articles."

Google's plans involve establishing a supposedly "qualitative" gauge of a news outlet's "credibility" by measuring features such as the size of the organization's staff and how long the publication has been in existence. The new "system" even incorporates "human evaluations" of the relative worth of each outlet.

The vague description of the method Google intends to patent explains that Google is developing a way to calculate the relative value — to you and me — of a news organization based on criteria apparently deemed worthy by techies and corporate executives. What they came up with is a far cry from anything journalists or amateur news hounds would likely have produced.

Included on the list of attributes Google values in a news organization are the "number of articles produced by the news source during a first time period," which can be combined with the "amount of important coverage that the news source provides in a second time period." This presumably refers to an

automated means of evaluating how the outlet fairs in the cable-news-driven game of determining which stories will pan out as having been "important," almost certainly assessed by software based on sheer volume of coverage each story receives. Of course, across most news media, "importance" of this kind is simply a measurement of monetary value, since most producers focus on stories that generate revenues.

Google's journalism experts also say they may take into account the amount of traffic the site receives, how many countries its visitors come from, circulation statistics, the size of the organization's staff and the number of bureaus it keeps in different locations. Many of these quantitative "quality" criteria are distinctly troubling. They are merely measurements of capital, which has more to do with the opinions potential investors hold of the organization's profit value, having nothing whatsoever to do with the quality of a given article the organization puts on the Web.

Still other considerations for Google include the "breadth of coverage" a site produces and something called a "breaking news score."

More often than not, as a rule of thumb, a specialized or local news outlet will cover a given issue or subject better than CNN or *The New York Times* or the BBC or any other global operation that might score very well in "breadth of coverage." If all you do is report on genetics, or Africa, or hometown politics, or video games, wouldn't it stand to reason you should fair considerably better in search results on that topic than an organization that dabbles lightly in everything? That is not to say that a news outlet cannot be broadly focused and still be very good, but why not let an outfit shine where it excels?

Also, the idea of providing a higher rating to outlets that offer more breaking news is like rewarding your partner for climaxing first. Breaking news is inherently subject to the most errors and the worst journalism. So it might be good to know that an outlet typically

Really, it doesn't take a conspiracy theorist to see that Google is self-consciously snuggling up with establishment media outlets and hobbling alternative and independent publishers.

... the idea of providing a higher rating to outlets that offer more breaking news is like rewarding your partner for climaxing first. Breaking news is inherently subject to the most errors and the worst journalism.

has *something* early on, but that is not a reliable method for evaluating the *quality* of its news reporting. It's bad enough that speed is considered more important than substance in corporate media today — why regard it as a defining component of quality.

Consider this factor: "the age of the news source may be taken as a measure of confidence by the public." As if the very existence of China's government-run Xinhua news service, or Voice of America, or for that matter the endowment-backed London *Guardian* is an indication that these outlets can be "trusted."

The most surprising aspect of Google's new method is its "human" assessors intend to evaluate each source. Here we see the introduction of the ever-ambiguous, all-powerful human "evaluator."

In another implementation, evaluators may be shown a selection of articles from individual news sources and asked to assign each source a score.

So much for the hands-off approach Google (as of press time) officially touts as "essential in helping you stay informed about the issues that matter most to you."

In keeping with its tradition of trade secrecy, Google won't talk about what it is up to, and there is no certainty that it has implemented or will implement any of the proposed methods to alter its ranking criteria. But concern that the one-level playing field is fast on its way to favoring the corporate industry leaders has spread far and wide on the Net, with small, independent publishers concerned that a major portal from the mainstream to the marginal is about to be squeezed shut.

A Good Idea Gone Awry

Really, it doesn't take a conspiracy theorist to see that Google is self-consciously snuggling up with establishment media outlets and hobbling alternative

and independent publishers. There are sensible criteria one could apply to improve search results for more objective factors of quality... were that one's actual goal. A few of those appear in Google's patent application. For instance, it makes sense to favor outlets that name their sources over those that simply assert "truths" and offer no means for vetting or verifying the accuracy of statements made, so Google's purported consideration of such factors is welcome. And it makes sense to favor hard news over commentary, if that were what they mean by writing style, since it's called Google News and not (at risk of sparking yet another trademark) Google Views.

But part of what Google refers to in its patent application as "writing style" is less valuable. Consider, for instance, "automated tests for measuring spelling correctness, grammar, and reading levels can be used to generate a metric value that reflects writing style."

It is not at all obvious that grammar and spelling should matter, though at least an argument could be made that better proofreading goes hand-in-hand with better editing, and that editing improves quality. But "reading level?" So Google is now trying to drive away users who read at lower levels? As much as we may hate the Neanderthal approach to news taken by the likes of Rupert Murdoch and the tabloids, it is difficult to make an argument that snooty is better.

continued next page

Comcast

Accidental Censorship: A Sign of Things to Come

For years, media concentration has affected what we see on television, hear on the radio, and read in newspapers. Now it seems that media concentration is also influencing what we can access over the Internet.

Last summer, a coalition of anti-war groups including Veterans for Peace, Code Pink, Global Exchange, and Iraq Veterans Against the War discovered that emails they sent containing a link to their website AfterDowningStreet.org were all automatically blocked from arriving in the in-boxes of people who use Comcast as their Internet Service Provider.

Some organizers included the website at the bottom of every email they sent. As such, each and every email they sent to Comcast users was being blocked. Because Comcast is the largest supplier of high-speed Internet access in the country, a whole lot of people who should have been getting the coalition's emails were not — and the group's organizing efforts suffered because of it. In some key cities like Washington, DC, a very high percentage of the people they were emailing used Comcast.

David Swanson, the co-founder of After Downing Street, does not think that Comcast intentionally censored the group's email messages. Rather, the coalition's website was accidentally included in a spam filter. The fact that it took days of work and the threat of a major activist campaign to get the company to lift the filters on the site suggests, however, that this could become a major problem in the future. Other websites could easily be included on spam lists — either accidentally or after false spam complaints by people who oppose a website's political content. Smaller groups with fewer resources than After Downing Street could have a much harder time getting the problem corrected.

Increasingly, much of the content on the Internet requires a high-speed broadband connection for people to access. Most Comcast users have at best only one other option for high-speed Internet access — their local phone monopoly. Many broadband customers do not even have that many options. The perpetual consumer threat to "take one's business elsewhere" is almost meaningless in the world of broadband service. It would be naïve to think that the Internet's effectiveness as a tool for social change will not be impacted as a result.

Get involved combating media concentration and protecting open access on the Internet at www.grassrootscable.com and www.democraticmedia.org.
-Arthur Stamoulis

Can the Grassroots Prevail? continued from previous page

The obvious solution for self-motivated independent media activists would be to develop an alternative to Google — something that is technologically comparable but grounded in grassroots rather than profit motivations. But this is astronomically easier said than done, not least because of Google's patented, secretive methods. Billions in capital, legions of server computers, a massive staff and infinite bandwidth don't hurt either.

That's what folks at OpenZuka strongly believe. The OpenZuka project came about very recently, in response to the threatened change to Google News, as a project to create an alternative news search engine. Rather than starting with a technical idea or a money-making scheme, OpenZuka's founders began with a ("tentative") set of values — diversity, empowerment, transparency and fairness — which they say should apply to the development team and the product alike.

If people with the technological savvy to make a project like that work also value independent media, there is a good chance that a powerful grassroots news scraper and search engine could become a reality. The need for Google News alternative may not be obvious today — and there is no telling if Google would find any success in a corporate news search engine as opposed to the more open model — but the tendency to corrupt will be overwhelming for any giant corporation with near-monopoly control over an information portal. ★

Brian Dominick is co-founder and co-editor of The NewStandard, a progressive, independent news website that relies heavily on Google News for its traffic.

STOP THE IVORY

Native American journalists join other journalists of color on the editing room floors of too many U.S. newspapers

Do you remember the last article in your daily paper about a nearby Native American tribe? If you do, chances are it was about a casino, a land claim lawsuit, or controversial school mascot, penned by a non-Native reporter who may have good intentions but who might be constructing the story from a background of historical inaccuracies and distortions.

For nearly two centuries, Native Americans have been misrepresented or caricatured in the mainstream media, their identity and culture often presented in patently offensive ways that have compromised the larger society's understanding of and relationship to these diverse Nations.

Few media outlets, if any, have specific Native beats, much less Native staff. In 2005, the estimated number of Native American newspaper journalists shrunk from 313 to 295, according to the yearly census conducted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

The 2005 annual survey from the Radio and Television News Directors Association also reports extremely low numbers, with Native Americans comprising only .3 percent of the TV workforce and .5 percent of the radio workforce.

Dan Lewerenz, president of the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA), is concerned that without many mentors to encourage them, Native youth won't see journalism as a viable career option. Lewerenz is also troubled by fluctuations in the number of Native journalists over the last seven years, saying in a NAJA statement that it "seems to indicate either an unwillingness or an inability of U.S. newspapers to retain Native journalists." Lewerenz believes newspaper executives should be doing more to increase these numbers, putting more resources into outreach and recruiting at tribal and community colleges.

NATIVE AMERICAN JOURNALISM HISTORY

- 1820** The Cherokee Nation in New Echota, Georgia, begins inventing a Cherokee alphabet
- 1828** *The Cherokee Phoenix* begins publication, written in both Cherokee and English
- 1831** White printers arrested for printing *The Cherokee Phoenix*
- 1835** The Georgia Guard destroys *The Cherokee Phoenix*, dumping its lead type down a well
- 1838** 14,000 Cherokees forced to leave their ancestral land, and take the "Trail of Tears"
- 1856** John Rollin Ridge and Charles Watie, of the Cherokee Nation, begin working at *The California American*
- 1857** Ridge helps to launch *The Sacramento Daily Bee*
- 1897** Mary Eddleman, a Cherokee, takes ownership of the *Muskogee Daily Times* and her family runs the paper in Muskogee, native territory
- 1898** Eddleman's daughter Myrta starts the magazine, *The Twin Territories*
- 1924** Another Eddleman daughter, Ora, begins working at KDFN, Wyoming's first radio station
- 1937** Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier launches a program on 170 stations to educate the public about tribal history and current affairs
- 1955** Navajos broadcast in their own language on radio stations in Arizona and New Mexico
- 1972** Navajo public radio broadcasts from Ramah, NM
- 1973** Tanna Beebe of the Cowitz and Quinault tribes becomes one of the first Native TV news reporters, working at KIRO-TV in Seattle
- 1981** *Indian Country Today* begins publication and builds a reputation on quality, original reporting on native issues

timeline compiled by Cathenne Komp using *Pictures of Our Nobler Selves*, by Mark Trahan and other web sources.

RY PRESSES!

Whites working at newspapers: 46,868

Supervisors: 11,726
Copy/Layout Editors: 9,247
Reporters: 21,022
Photographers: 4,872

One university could help boost the next wave of Native American journalists. Last August, Syracuse University announced the Haudenosaunee Promise Scholarship Fund, which will cover tuition and on-campus room and board for citizens of the Onondaga, Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, and Tuscarora Nations. The university, which is home to the Newhouse School of Public Communications, is also offering an unlimited number of scholarships, which will cover each year of study toward a bachelor's degree.

Robert Odawi-Porter, from the Seneca Nation and the Director of S.U.'s Indian Law Center, says the scholarships will be significant in eliminating some of the barriers to higher education. "It's really uncharted waters in many ways," said Odawi-Porter. "There's been a lot of devastation to our culture and language, but you have to do what you can to revitalize it."

-Catherine Komp

1985 Native American Journalists Association is formed

1986 First broadcast of KTNN in Arizona, a commercial station owned by Navajo tribal government

1989 Hattie Kauffman, from the Nez Perce Nation, is the first Native woman to report a story on the national evening news

1990 National Native News begins 5-minute daily radio broadcast. Later, Independent Native News forms from defecting NNN producers

1995 Native American Times started by Elizabeth Gaines-Gray in the utility room of a convenience store in Afton, Oklahoma.

1998 The Oneida Nation of New York purchases *Indian Country Today*

2001 Frank J King III and Lise Balk King start the *Native Voice*, later to become the largest, Native-owned independent newspaper

African-Americans working at newspapers: 2,985

Supervisors: 597
Copy/Layout Editors: 500
Reporters: 1567
Photographers: 321

Latinos working at newspapers: 2,323

Supervisors: 460
Copy/Layout Editors: 366
Reporters: 1,120
Photographers: 378

Asians working at newspapers: 1,664

Supervisors: 271
Copy/Layout Editors: 323
Reporters: 781
Photographers: 289

Native Americans working at newspapers: 295

Supervisors: 91
Copy/Layout Editors: 56
Reporters: 115
Photographers: 33



a conversation with Native American journalist

MARK TRAHAN

Interview by Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock

One of the leading Native American journalists in the U.S., Mark Trahan grew up on the Shoshone-Bannock reservation in Idaho, and began his journalism career there with *Sho-Ban News*. His lengthy resume includes positions as editor and publisher of the *Moscow-Pullman Daily News*, executive news editor of the *Salt Lake Tribune*, editor and publisher of *Navajo Nation Today*, and a national reporter for *The Arizona Republic*, where he was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for a project on government failures in federal Indian policy.

Today, Trahan is the editorial writer for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, and serves as a trustee of The Freedom Forum, a DC-based free press and free speech organization.

Trahan may be best known for a question he posed at the 2004 UNITY Convention — a question that would become the most talked about of the conference. Trahan asked President Bush what he thought was the meaning of Sovereignty in the 21st Century. Bush's response was replayed in the alternative media outlets for weeks: "Tribal sovereignty means that. It's sovereign. You're a ... you're a ... you've been given sovereignty and you're viewed as a sovereign entity."

Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock, executive producer of *Independent Native News*, a daily five-minute National news broadcast produced in Alaska, recently discussed with Trahan some of the most prominent issues in Native American journalism.

First off, please tell us a little bit about your background personally and professionally. What led you to the career of journalism and what influences did you have early on?

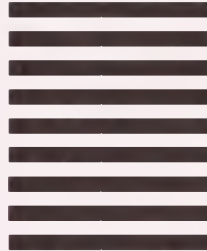
I read newspapers pretty early. My grandmother would eagerly show off her tribal newspaper from Fort Peck whenever it showed up in the mail. Everyone in our family would then talk about the news.

When discussing Native journalism, we're often talking about two different things: mainstream media reporting on Nations and Governments that they don't completely understand, or Native News organizations that are often too closely tied to tribal councils, which dictate the news content. Either way, it's difficult to adequately report on Native issues in this country. What are some ways you think these problems can be addressed and where can we find some middle ground?

I don't think that just because you work for a tribal newspaper you have to be closely tied to the tribal council. I like the notion that as a tribal editor you work for the people, not those elected. Good community journalism is often found in tribal newspapers and has been for a long time. There are challenges with freedom of



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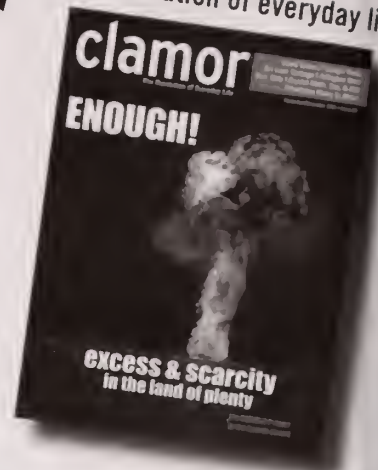
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the press which also has a long history. Tribal leaders can and do shut papers or fire editors.

Native journalists are the most under represented group in newsrooms in America. What do you think causes this under-representation?

Mostly numbers. American Indians and Alaskan Natives are such a small part of the U.S. population — so small it's been easy to overlook the potential.

There is a consensus that the Red Lake high school shooting tragedy revealed some major flaws in the way the mainstream media covers issues occurring on reservations, and the lack of understanding about Sovereignty, cultural differences, and privacy. Native journalists also expressed frustration, but from the inside, about how hard this story was to cover. Do you think there are different rules when covering these kinds of issues, or is it simply a matter of just slowing down and showing compassion and integrity?

I think there are different rules on reservations. I think it's important for any journalist to understand and appreciate those rules. That said, I think there's great leeway for a journalist to get the story no matter what the rules are. It just takes hard work, patience and respect.

Native journalists who file with my program, Independent Native News, often tell stories of having little or no support when they try to report on sensitive issues within their communities. Some of these people stop reporting altogether, because it's too conflicting and even dangerous, and in one case a reporter was forced to leave her community. These scenarios are more common for Native reporters than probably other groups. What advice do you have for reporter in this situation?

I saw some of that during the Navajo Nation's leadership dispute in the late 1980s. But I think it's rare. More often than not, the censorship I see in the native press is self-censorship. It's easy to back off a story thinking about the consequences.

Can you talk about a free press society and what that would mean in Indian

country? Right now the Navajo Nation in the Southwest and the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma are seen as paving the way in this area, but that's only been in the last few years, even though the National Congress of American Indians passed a free press resolution in 2003. Is it possible to have a free press in Indian Country? What do you think the future holds on this issue?

I think it's great when tribal communities come up with solutions to really tough philosophical problems. That's the case in both the Cherokee and Navajo situations. We need more of that kind of creativity.

Your book about Native American Journalism is titled Pictures of Our Nobler Selves, a phrase from John Rollin Ridge about the work of Native American poets and journalists. Why did that phrase resonate with you? Is it a phrase that can help to better understand today's Native journalism, and to outline a future path that strengthens both Native media and inclusion of Native journalists in mainstream media?

I like shattering stereotypes. I wanted to attack the idea of a noble Indian by showing how smart and talented folks were in the 19th century. When I wrote that book, even people at the Sacramento Bee didn't know the paper was founded by a Cherokee editor.

What do you think will be the impact of new technologies on Native media? Will increasing access to the tools needed to create web-based media make it easier for Native media to reach more people and sustain itself?

I hope so. Native people have been experimenting on the web from its earliest incarnation. That's great. The Internet, like radio and print, is accessible. Folks are limited only by their imagination. (As compared to, say, television because so much money is required to participate in the medium.)

Many feel that to work in non-Native media means assimilation, and a loss of tribal identity. In your life, has this been an issue?

I see assimilation as a two-way street.

What do you borrow? What do you learn? What do you contribute? I think I add to general discourse because I have a way of looking at the world that's different from my colleagues' views. That's the way it is supposed to be.

And to segue from that last question, you are in a position to affect change, since you are a Native person working in non-Native media. Can you cite specific examples from your experiences at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, of how your background and knowledge has contributed to the outcome or perspective of certain stories?

It's hard to quantify on my end. But I write my column, often focusing on issues that would not get attention in the mainstream media as well as help craft our editorial positions. So I hope all that work shows up in our newsroom, but I will leave that for others and history to judge. ★

Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock is the producer of Independent Native News, a five minute National radio newscast produced in Fairbanks, Alaska. Born and raised in Alaska, she also writes creative fiction and non-fiction, as well as poetry.

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OPULENT
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Mouth of the South

words Catherine Murphy



telesur

In the constant, excessive deluge of modern media, the scarcity of real news and analysis among the din is striking. Commercial television, a highly elite medium, has never reflected the diverse voices and opinions of the world's people. The vast majority find themselves with little or no representation in mainstream television — their hopes, dreams, and struggles systematically excluded from pervasive commercial programming.

But in July 2005, Latin America took bold measures to break from corporate media control of the airwaves, and made broadcast history by launching TeleSur, an independent, regional satellite television network.

La Televisora del Sur, or Television of the South, was created as an alternative to private networks like CNN and Univision. The network states it has an anti-hegemonic mission to build media and information sovereignty, to tell the true stories of Latin American people, and to show "Latin America through Latin American eyes."

Spawned from decades of community media efforts to gain access to mass audiences, but only made possible by support of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, the network's \$6 million budget is funded by Venezuela (51%), Argentina (20%), Cuba (19%), and Uruguay (10%). Other Latin American nations such as Brazil may contribute sponsorship in the future.

The directorate is multi-national as well. TeleSur's president Andres Izarra, former Venezuelan Minister of Communications, stepped down from his

government post to avoid conflicts of interest. This move is partially credited to the urgings of writer and board member Tariq Ali, who said the channel must be entirely independent in order to be truly effective.

TeleSur's General Director is Aran Arahonian, a veteran Uruguayan journalist who has lived in Caracas for years, and who also publishes the progressive newspaper *Question*.

Director of Programming Jorge Botero is an award-winning Colombian TV producer, who is often quoted as saying "Independent, always. Neutral, never!"

Along with Ali, the advisory board includes poet Ernesto Cardenal, actor and activist Danny Glover, Argentinian filmmaking great Fernando Pino Solanas, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, most of whom were present at the launching. They did not hold back concerns: along with Ali's emphasis on the need for full independence, Glover urged greater representation of African descendants and indigenous people, and more female board members, saying "we must remember who we are talking to." Chavez, who telephoned the launching event to congratulate everyone, emphasized that he was in agreement with Glover's comments.

TeleSur bureaus are located in Bogota, Mexico City, Lima, Brasilia, Buenos Aires, Havana Montevideo, and Washington DC, and a network of independent contributors work throughout the continent. The current staff at the head office in Caracas totals about 60 people, who have come from all over Latin America to work at the station.

The journalism crew is noticeably young, some of them new to the field of television. Twenty-three year old Yanlisbert "Libertad" Velazco, for example, comes from a working-class Caracas

neighborhood. Active in community education and organizing efforts since she was 14, Velazco brings her loyalty to grassroots struggles to her TV journalism. "People bring their real issues to me, and that is what I will present," said Velazco.

TeleSur began with four hours of daily programming, and plans to reach eight hours of by the end of September. There are also plans for internet streaming within the next few months. Content will be largely self-produced, but will also draw on community and independent programming from contributors and collaborators from around the region.

TeleSur producers say they prioritize news segments, chronicles, and Latin American documentaries and film classics in the schedule. But Latin American alternative music videos and programs on traditional and contemporary arts and culture will also be broadcast. One special film program called "Nojollywood" (Spanish phonetics for "No Hollywood.") highlights independent films from around the world.

On the first day of programming, news stories included the disappearance of the Amazon rainforest; personal testimonies from some of the three million people displaced by the war in Colombia; a march by four thousand Argentinian children against hunger and poverty; and the Brazilian immigrant killed by police in the London public train station last summer after they wrongly identified him as a "terrorist."

Producers also used a popular street survey style of interviewing during the debut to make several points about their mission, asking people of diverse ages, "What is the capital of France?" All responded "Paris." Then came, "What is the capital of Honduras?" Answers ranged from "Hmm... Nicaragua? Guatemala? Ay ay ay!" until the final answer arrived, "Tegucigalpa?" Point well made.

At the launch, General Director Arahonian said, "We will finally see each other's faces, we will get to know each other, and only by truly knowing each other, can we begin to love each other and ourselves."

After watching some of the broadcasts, Caracas resident Saddys Ortega commented, "The US programming we've watched for years is a kind of news that gets you to NOT think. This programming makes you think! These are the stories they don't want us to see, and for exactly that reason we need to look."

Maybe this is precisely what is so threatening to Washington. Even before TeleSur's content was known, opponents of the network were rallying against the

station, calling it "TeleChavez" and claiming that its main purpose was to spread anti-US propaganda. Congress member Connie Mack (R-Florida) claimed that the "show" could "shift the balance of power in the Western Hemisphere." Urged by Mack and others, the US House passed an amendment a week before the launch to create a TV and radio station that broadcasts "accurate" news into Venezuela, much like Miami's Radio and TV Marti, which is broadcast to Cuba using \$40 million per year in US funds.

Mack said Chavez is using TeleSur to try to "incorporate his revolution to all of South America," adding that, "we wanted to make sure the Venezuelans have the opportunity to hear the ideals of freedom." The measure has been highly criticized, even by the US ambassador to Venezuela, and would still need to pass in the Senate.

Meanwhile, TeleSur continues to shake up the media landscape, broadcasting by satellite out of Caracas across the Americas - South, Central and North - and to North Africa, and Europe. The network is still young, and its future un-

certain. But if it does succeed, TeleSur could in fact shift the balance of power in the South American media arena, challenging much of the commercial, US-based programming broadcast throughout the region.

Supporters of TeleSur are confident, including Arahonian: "We have begun to dismantle the Latin American media plantation." There may be no turning back. ☆

Catherine Murphy, social researcher and independent media activist, has spent much of the last year in Venezuela. She is currently working on a documentary film on the role of Women in the Cuban Literacy Campaign of 1961.

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OPERATION (OPEN WATER) VULA MANZI

RESISTING WATER PRIVATIZATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

words & photos Matthew M. Kavanagh

In black townships outside Johannesburg, many residents are forced to choose between buying enough food to eat and buying water for basic hygiene and sanitation. Now that they are forced to pre-pay for any water beyond a basic minimal level, many families worry about how to care for sick relatives or what they would do in the event of a fire. While the water company says that pre-paid meters will help people with water conservation, many in Soweto have opted to illegally bypass the meters to obtain water they could not otherwise afford.

The Right to Water

The African National Congress' Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), the platform for its victory in the post-apartheid 1994 elections, made many promises for a "better life for all." Among them was the promise to quickly provide 25 litres of water per person per day for free to all South Africans, while they worked on longer-term solutions. According to the WHO's *Guidelines for Water Quality*, 25 litres is thought to be sufficient only for people without sanitation systems — people without toilets who are carrying water to their homes. For homes with "intermediate" service — like most of Soweto — 50 litres is considered the basic amount needed for proper hygiene. Indeed, in the medium-term — which one might expect to have been reached 11 years after democratization — the RDP promised 50-60 litres per person per day.

Yet, under intense pressure from the World Bank and global capital, the minimal promise on 25 litres per day was not implemented until 2001. When it was, though, the "lifeline" amount of water had somehow morphed into 6,000 litres per

opposite: Paul Mabe of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee holds a meter disconnected by the group in order to provide free water to residents

household per month. Mike Muller of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) explains this number as 25 litres per person per day for an average family of eight. "It is perfectly possible to function in an urban area on a bucket of water per person per day," he says.

But, as Patrick Bond, Professor at the University of KwaZulu Natal notes, urban families often live with many more than eight people. "A household of 16 is not uncommon in the big townships when you've got back yard shack dwellers and a granny who is looking after AIDS orphans."

Paul Mabe, a 64-year-old resident of Naledi, Soweto, is wondering why he is the one that has to tighten his belt from the 20,000 litres allotted under Apartheid. "If you go to Joburg there are so many industries with water running right through, around the clock. People in Santon [a wealthy white area] have got swimming pools everywhere, but it is for the people who are only using water for basic life — we are the ones who are supposed to cut back?"

Indeed, domestic consumers use just 12% of South Africa's water — with just 1% being used by black households. Despite the disproportionately small amount of water used by black homes, under the management of French water conglomerate Suez, Johannesburg Water (JW) has turned to the black townships like Soweto to launch its 342 million Rand water conservation project called "Operation Gein'Amanzi" (Save Water).

Conservation for the Poor, Hedonism for the Rich

Perhaps more to the point than simple conservation, "Operation Gein'Amanzi" seeks to ensure that people pay for every drop of water they use past the free 6,000 litres provided by the government. The problem in places like Soweto and Orange Farm — black townships with levels of development and poverty ranging from bad to horrendous — is that people cannot afford to pay more.

Jennifer Makotsane, 34, is a case in point. All of the adults in her family are out of work in the neoliberalized South African economy which has plagued places like Soweto well over 50% unemployment. Since her father died, she and her nine family members have lived on her mother's pension of 780 Rand per month (about 120 U.S. dollars). In a country where food, clothing, and basic service costs rival those in the United States, there is just no money left over at the end of the month to pay for enough water.

"It is so difficult to choose between buying food in the house for children and buying water," Makotsane says. "The government promised when we voted in 1994 that there would be free water, but the 6,000 litres lasts only 14 days."

In Orange Farm, another focus of JW's project, the situation is even worse. With over a million people in the township, there is about 70% unemployment. Many people survive on a few hundred Rand in welfare grants per month. "I understand that someone has to pay for water," says Bricks Mokolo of the Orange Farm Water Crisis Committee, "but people are not working. Where is this money supposed to come from?"

Many people in these communities have run up astronomical debts to the municipality for unpaid basic service bills — into the tens of thousands of Rands. Jennifer's mother owes over 22,000 Rand (3,400 U.S. dollars) — what she gets in two-and-a-half years of pension payments.

Disconnecting people from water has proved deeply unpopular, sparking major protests. Instead, JW has implemented the novel idea of making people pay for their water ahead of time — a way that forces people to "self" disconnect.

Beginning in Orange Farm and continuing to the present in Soweto, JW has been installing pre-paid water meters. After the 6,000 free litres have been consumed, the meter shuts off water to the house unless the resident goes to the JW office and purchases water units, which are loaded onto a high-tech "key" which they can then insert into their water meter.

Pre-paid water and electricity meters destroyed by the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee



We are resisting the installation of pre-paid water and reconnecting the community because no one can survive without water. They say it's illegal, but we say it's illegal for them to disconnect water.

The installation of the pre-paid meters has itself led to legal challenges, protests and direct action — objections dismissed by the government. “It’s a question of accepting the management system,” says Muller of DWAF. “What people are objecting to is effective management systems, because people want to use more. People are trying to get more than their fair share.”

Others suggest that pre-paid meters — which have been banned in the UK — are simply inhumane. Those with larger families or who perhaps need more water to care for one of the 370,000 people who die each year of AIDS must cough up more money or go without. People who run out of money for water units may simply be too poor to do things like bathe, care for the sick, or put out a house fire. Indeed, in one recent Soweto case, two children, 10 and 6, died in a shack fire when owners and neighbors ran out of water trying to put out the fire.

“When my father got sick last year we had to use a lot of water we could not afford,” says Makotsane. “We needed water to bathe him, to wash his dressings daily, to wash his blankets. We had to bathe ourselves daily [to prevent infection], to drink, to cook with because he had to eat certain kinds of food. It became difficult because the 6,000 litres was so insufficient that in 9 days it would run out. We would have to go and buy water and keep on buying and buying.”

“With pre-paid meters people won’t owe anything to the company, it’s true, but they won’t have water either,” says Jabu Molobela, a member of the Phiri Concerned Residents Committee.

“This is not what people were expecting after struggling for liberation,” says Orange Farm’s Mokolo. “During apartheid we were struggling against a system that developed only for the White communities. But under apartheid there were no water cut offs. They come only since the ANC ... and the local governments began outsourcing water management to the multinational companies. Now those who do not have money cannot access water, it is only those with money who can enjoy and drink water. This is a new kind of apartheid.”

The government and JW argue that that theirs is a progressive policy. Indeed, the price per litre increases as more water is consumed — money that Muller says cross-subsidizes small users. “Every time I see a nice green garden in a rich community I say, ‘fantastic, that’s ten communities they’re cross subsidizing,’” says Muller.

But the Johannesburg-based Coalition Against Water Privatization and others suggest that the policy is hardly progressive. With the “free basic water” policy, came sharp yearly increases in prices for those using a few more liters. Those using just 10,000 litres — still under the recommended 50 litres per person per day — have seen the price of their water increase 56% since 2002. Large users, however, have seen only a 29% increase — which is much more easily absorbed in families that actually have disposable income.

“The government is cross subsidizing people a little bit, but the question is how much?” asks Professor Bond, who has argued unsuccessfully for a much more progressive system. “The tariff system doesn’t really hurt the rich who are consuming hedonistically and have big green lawns and swimming pools and really abuse the scarce water. If those wealthy

hedonistic users of water could be charged much higher rates then there’d be much greater subsidies to give everyone a much greater amount — to save more lives and hopefully not to build more dams.”

“It really is outrageous when a Mike Muller, who has such great power to regulate the system and punish municipalities, is simply sitting back and letting a kind of water apartheid to continue and pretending it’s helping the poor when so much, much more could be done,” says Bond.

Resisting False Scarcity

Apart from the technical arguments about cross subsidization and liters per day, activists in South Africa are questioning the very basis of the system of water in the region.

In Johannesburg, after much marching and filing of law-suits, activists have begun reconnecting their communities to free water supplies they say they deserve. “Each and every human being has a right to sufficient and clean water,” says Phiri’s Molobela. “We are resisting the installation of pre-paid water and reconnecting the community because no one can survive without water. They say it’s illegal, but we say it’s illegal for them to disconnect water.”

The result has been a running war since 2002 between the municipality and the residents, with wins and losses on both sides. After the initial Gcin’Amanzi project in one section of Orange Farm, activists used education and direct action to successfully block the installation of pre-paid meters in the rest of the township. “We have a slogan,” says Mokolo, “‘Destroy the meter, enjoy free water’ and we have been very serious about this.”

The repression has been substantial: Many activists have been arrested blocking the installation of pre-paid meters in their homes or for reconnecting people to the water system — meeting with exorbitant bail costs and time in jail. In Orange Farm, a leading activist was shot dead in her home at the height of the struggle there — a crime as yet unsolved. Activists have been called anti-development terrorists and demonized as common criminals.

Still, the activists are unbowed. After reconnecting dozens of residents to water in Naledi, Soweto this August, activists from the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee marched to the office of the city councilor and dumped the destroyed meters in a pile. “Down with pre-paid meters, down,” shouted one old woman. “The water does not belong to the councilors, and if you don’t learn that soon we’ll be back for your house!” Having disconnected the mayor of Johannesburg’s water two years back, it is unlikely these grannies are making idle threats. ★

Matthew M. Kavanagh is an activist and educator working, at the time of this writing, with several social movement organizations in South Africa. He has written for Clamor and Z Magazine as well as education and law journals. He is currently working on a radio-documentary about water struggles in Southern Africa and moving back to DC to work with the NGO Global Justice.



NO SWEAT!

Smooth-featured Alice Njoka* is a typical 19 year old. She enjoys watching TV, listening to music, and hanging out with her friends. She's fashionably sleek in bright outfits the color of her favorite soft drink, orange Fanta. And like most young women in Kenya, Alice dreams of someday attending college, getting a good paying job, and of course, falling in love.

"I have so many dreams, which I don't know if they will come to be true," she says, gazing sideways, her hair falling loosely from the ponytail behind her ears. Alice has worked for over a year as a machine operator at the Sinolink Garment Manufacturing factory in the Mombasa Export Processing Zone (EPZ). She makes clothes for Wal-Mart and other U.S. buyers such as Steve and Barry's, the third largest producer of garments that sport university logos. But working for American companies hasn't been a dream job for Alice or the thousands of other young African women employed in Kenya's EPZs.

Since her father became unemployed, Alice is the family's only breadwinner. She couldn't afford to finish high school and now must find a way to cover living expenses for herself, her parents, and two younger siblings. The minimum monthly wage in Kenya ranges from 3800 to 5000 shillings depending on skill level, according to the EPZ Authority. The wage is based on a 45-hour workweek and overtime must be paid at a rate of one-and-a-half. However, due to rampant corruption and a dismally slow bureaucracy, the government does little to enforce these labor standards.

Many factories do not pay the legal minimum wage or overtime, instead

finding ways to pay the workers based on how many goods they produce. According to Alice, this piece-rate system is unfair. The factory sets unrealistically high production targets, she says. "because if you don't finish the target and you just do it half-way they again pay you piece-rate. And that is maybe 100 shillings and you have worked for 12 hours." One hundred shillings is enough money for Alice to buy three Fantas, but it is not enough to pay for lunch. It barely covers round-trip bus fare to the factory.

Sexual harassment is another problem facing garment workers in Kenya, the majority of which are young, uneducated women like Alice. She describes it as a "normal" part of her working environment and even a standard part of the hiring process. "They just tell you openly, just sleep with me and you'll get a job," she says. Because desperation for work is so high in Kenya, many young women feel they must give in to demands for sex. If they refuse to have sex with managers, they will be fired and replaced by a woman who will. Workers in the Ruawaka and Ahti River EPZs say that rape is also common, especially on forced night shifts. In a country fighting a devastating AIDS epidemic, sexual harassment can be deadly. At age 19, Alice has already lost two of her close friends

**Opportunity spells
oppression for African
sweatshop workers
making U.S. goods**

www.48 Amrah Salomon Johnson

to AIDS. She fears being put in a situation where she would have to "sell herself," because the stigma of AIDS makes many who carry the disease lie about it. "They don't want to be alone," she says. "So they must keep infecting."

Betting on the Union

In 2003, the workers at Sinolink began to organize to join the Tailors and Textile Workers Union in an effort to deal with some of their problems with the factory, ranging from low wages, unpaid overtime, unpaid maternity leave, sexual harassment, and safety concerns. Alice became a leader in the union organizing effort and was even given the title of "Chairlady." In Kenya a trade union must only prove support from a simple majority of 51 percent of the workforce in order to be recognized by an employer and begin contract negotiations. According to the independent workplace monitoring organization, the Workers' Rights Consortium (WRC), the union had gathered more than the simple majority of members. Still, the employer refused to recognize the union. Workers filed a complaint with the WRC and the organization launched an investigation that found in favor of the workers. The WRC then contacted one of the factory's buyers, collegiate apparel maker Steve and Barry's and asked them to intervene. With combined pressure from the buyer, the union recently won recognition and is underway with contract negotiations to improve working standards.

The problem is that, for reasons unrelated to the organizing campaign, Sinolink is now losing much of its business. For decades, an international trade agreement known as the Multi-Fiber Arrangement established quotas that diversified the source of garment and textile imports into the U.S. This agreement protected small developing countries like Kenya from having to compete head on with industrial giants such as China, where independent unions are illegal, infrastructure is far superior, fabric does not have to be imported, and goods can be made faster and cheaper. With the demise of the quota system in January 2005, many buyers abandoned Africa for Asia. By July, nine factories in Kenya closed and many others were barely surviving, according to Kenyan economist Jacob Omolo.

By mid-year, Sinolink was down to only two production lines, employing just 50 workers out of their usual 1,000-person workforce. Alice and most of her coworkers were laid off in the middle of union negotiations. Sinolink General Manager Kalimundin M. Hassanali says, "We're just waiting for orders to come through and then we'll be working our best to get them back."

In this new environment, Sinolink is actually much more open to the union. They are gambling on the hope that buyers will appreciate their new concern for workers and place orders soon. "Part of why we joined the union was so there's [now] a collective agreement for the welfare of the worker and also in our own interest, to make sure things are right for the workers' welfare and work environment," says Hassanali. Steve and Barry's has promised to continue their business, but Wal-Mart and other buyers are increasingly looking to China and India.

Back in the United States

Christina Dixon graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1998 and still returns to buy clothes with the UC Berkeley logo. She is worried about workers' rights in Africa, but feels that boycotts are not a good way to express her concern. "Cause if I read a story then I would go, 'well I'm not buying any of them.' Then you cause problems and then the workers would lose their jobs and they can't eat."

Valerie Orth at Global Exchange thinks it will take increased pressure from customers to insist that brands support union factories. For the past year she has organized an impressive coalition of over 50 labor, faith, and civic groups to push the city of San Francisco into adopting a "Sweat Free" ordinance. The bill is the strongest legislation of its kind and launched the typically progressive California municipality into the spotlight of the global struggle for workers' rights.

The power of the legislation is twofold. It prevents the city and county government from purchasing goods produced in sweatshops that do not meet basic wage and working conditions, but it also prevents them from buying from companies that attempt to block unionization efforts. "Now when the Workers' Rights Consortium or another indepen-

dent monitor finds an abuse in China or that workers are trying to organize in Vietnam," Orth says, "we can actually use the legislation to say, 'in order for you to supply the city of San Francisco, you have to allow these workers to organize.'"

This controversial clause was a hard sell to the mayor and city attorneys who otherwise supported the legislation but feared litigation from trying to impose standards on other countries. Yet when over 200 people flooded a public hearing on the legislation to demand the right to unionize be included, the mayor's office gave in. After almost a year of organizing, the city's Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the ordinance in mid-August.

Days after Orth's "Sweat Free San Francisco" coalition landed their victory, the group was already planning the next campaign. They now hope to stir a movement of other cities and state governments to also adopt freedom of association ordinances. They may also adopt campaigns focusing on university uniforms and school district purchases. But in the big picture, the "Sweat Free" coalition hopes to see anti-sweatshop activism move beyond garments into other industries.

Christina Dixon supports the idea of customers and brands working together to launch ethical standards into the mainstream. "You have a voice. A lot of people don't think they have a voice. I wish the Kenyan people could get a better voice." ☆

* Some names have been changed to protect the identity of factory workers.

To get involved with a campaign in your area, contact Global Exchange at www.globalexchange.org, or if you are a student, contact United Students Against Sweatshops at www.usasnet.org.

Amrah Salomon Johnson is a political activist and writer living between Berkeley and San Francisco, California. Her non-fiction has been published in El Tecolote, The East Bay Express, Mesh Magazine and Kitchen Sink Magazine. She also writes poetry, fiction and drama and is a featured performer at the annual GIRLSTOCK arts festival. She can be contacted at amrahsj@yahoo.com.

WHEN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

An Interview with Joy Butts and George McCollough on the Role of Eminent Domain in Urban Renewal

interview by Arthur Stamoulis

All around the country, local governments are forcing property owners to give up their homes or businesses so that large tracts of desirable land can be turned over to developers and converted into high-priced condominiums, shopping centers and sports stadiums. The property owners are paid for their land, but they don't have a choice whether or not they will sell. It is a process designed to increase a municipality's tax base by replacing existing homes with more expensive ones, existing businesses with more profitable ones. It is "community redevelopment" at its worst.

The impact this type of redevelopment has on communities is the subject of the film *All for the Taking*, which documents the use of eminent domain in Philadelphia and its surrounding suburbs. *Clamor* economics editor Arthur Stamoulis had the chance to speak with filmmakers Joy Butts and George McCollough via email in late August.

What is eminent domain?

George: Eminent domain is a power granted to the government whereby it can seize private property for public use. Traditionally, it has been used to obtain land for public schools, highways, railroads, military bases. In the 1950s, the Supreme Court, in an urban renewal case, expanded the idea of public purpose to include the removal of blight. The recent

Supreme Court case *Kalo v. New London CT* expanded this power even further to include that private economic development equals public purpose.

How is eminent domain being used in Philadelphia?

George: In 2001, the City of Philadelphia undertook the most ambitious urban renewal project in its history, the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative (NTI). The goal of NTI is to create "land banks" to encourage private developers to begin new housing projects, something the City hasn't seen in years. One of the ways in which the City is acquiring the property is by exercising the power of eminent domain.

Joy: In the past two-and-a-half years the City has acquired 2,221 properties through NTI, most of which have been used as land banking for private developers. This was accomplished by declaring properties as "blighted." In some cases, if one house was declared blighted, then they took the entire block of houses.

George: Originally the City's long-time residents were excited by NTI, thinking that their long-neglected neighborhoods would finally get some much-needed attention. Little did they know, but moving them out of the way and attracting new residents was NTI's main goal.

Joy: There are a number of homeowners that have been given little or nothing for their property. An example would be being offered \$2,000 to \$12,000 — when the NTI through its Blight Program allocated \$134,000 per property for demolition of properties. The highest amount paid to a homeowner for a property that I know of was \$62,000. In so many cases, the homeowners have been kept in the

dark as to what their rights are. *There was a recent Supreme Court ruling, alluded to earlier, that states that local governments can use eminent domain for more than just public projects like a highway or a park. The court said they can also use eminent domain for private developments like condos or a shopping center, which could perhaps increase a municipality's tax base. What are your views on this ruling? Will it have any impact on what's already happening in Philly?*

Joy: The ruling of *Kalo v. New London, CT* has in effect given carte blanche to all the private developers throughout the United States of America to take any land that they deem necessary to their agenda.

George: Just before beginning this film, I purchased a house and began rehabbing it as a place to live. During the course of making the film I'd be working on my place while witnessing the City taking homes from people. So I became very sensitive to the feelings and emotions that these folks were going through.

I'm sure that city officials feel justified in their actions after the recent Supreme Court ruling. However, that to me does not justify what they have put people through. If they did have to lose their homes in the name of progress, why not let the free market system work for them? If they have a piece of property that a developer wants, let the developer make an offer that satisfies both parties — not have the government come in and grab the land on the cheap.

I was surprised to learn from your film that eminent domain is impacting white business owners in fairly affluent suburbs, in addition to less-affluent homeowners in predominantly black neigh-

BECOMES COMMUNITY DISPLACEMENT



above: stills from *All for the Taking*

"... the land barons have returned, this time with the help and assistance of the U.S. government."

borhoods. What roles do race and class play in "community redevelopment"? Who, exactly, are these communities being redeveloped for?

George: Race and class plays a major role in what is taking place in Philadelphia. Most of the urban redevelopment is taking place in a ring around center-city. The neighborhoods are low-income and mostly people of color. These neighborhoods are however in very desirable locations — easy access to center-city, close to entertainment and cultural venues and major transportation routes. It's really no surprise that these folks would not benefit from City policies. The system has never worked very well for poor people.

What is surprising, however, is how eminent domain is being used in other areas throughout the country. Eminent domain seems to be being used in just about every city and town across the US. It's no longer good enough to work hard and pay your taxes when governments have their eye on higher tax revenues. The recent Supreme Court ruling should be a wake up call to the middle class that economic policies that have treated the poor so harshly are finally catching up to them.

Joy: White businesses in the suburbs are being impacted in some of the same ways

as the poor in the inner cities. The object is prime land that the developers want. This time around it is not just minorities that are being targeted. The targets this time are all economic. That is, the poor and the middle class are now targets. It is not black vs. white this time but the rich vs. the poor, including the middle class along with the poor.

George: Ardmore, PA — the town outside of Philadelphia that we visit in the film — is your typical small town America. The businesses that are being seized there are all family-owned, multi-generational businesses. They are being taken so chain stores can come in and operate. The most ironic thing is that the local Veterans of Foreign Wars post in Ardmore is being seized at the same time our country is fighting a foreign war.

Joy: Yes, the land barons have returned, this time with the help and assistance of the U.S. government.

What role do you hope your film will play in these issues — and how can people get a hold of it?

George: The main goal of the film was to document the stories of the people experiencing losing their homes, so their

histories wouldn't be end up like their houses, discarded.

We have received a very strong response from the film so far and it has had a cathartic effect in other communities experiencing the same fate. The stories told in the film certainly created a lasting effect on me, and hopefully the film's audience.

We are holding screenings of the film throughout the neighborhoods of Philadelphia and have been invited to screen it in other communities that are experiencing urban renewal and eminent domain. We hope to have it seen on broadcast TV. This fall it will be distributed through Berkeley Media [www.berkeleymedia.com].

Joy: My goal for *All for the Taking* is for America to wake up to the fact that no longer is the phrase "a man's home is his castle" true — if it has ever been true. With the Supreme Court rulings and the U.S. government's support of corporations, no one is safe in this country from the grips of eminent domain. Hardworking citizens can no longer guarantee that the property they worked to acquire will be passed down to their heirs. ☆

Arthur Stamoulis is Economics editor at Clamor.



Life in Rio de la Anona, Mexico

words Leanne Tory-Murphy

The only thing that marks it from the highway is a small tree offering very little shade and a sign proclaiming contact information for "The Musical Force 'The Kings!'" The earth here is red, desert and seemingly unoccupied, but a two-kilometer walk back on hilly, dry roads brings one to a town called Rio de la Anona. The river that the town is named after does not contain water most of the year and so is used as a road or a place to let the sheep pasture. Everyone is waiting for rain, but for now the skies are bright blue and painfully sunny.

Rain, of course, is not the only thing they are waiting for. The waiting infects almost every aspect of life. Irma has been waiting for her husband. A heavy-set woman with a girlish giggle, she manages a small shop of basic supplies and foodstuffs. Eggs, rice, beans, tamarind.... everything is in good order and well stocked, especially the men's shaving razors, covered with dust, of which not one has been bought. Men's shaving razors are not necessary here, because there are no men.

Of her husband, Irma tells me, "He left seven years ago, I have not received one letter or phone call. He sends money sometimes, but it is not enough." Her story is not unusual for this town or for many in Mexico, where an estimated 300,000 emigrate yearly. Today occupied primarily by women and children, the men of Rio de la Anona venture across the northern border to find work, and few return. Sending money from places like Los Angeles, New York, Dallas and Atlanta, they sustain the town's threadbare existence. But there are no prospects beyond sustenance in the area. And so every week an average of about 5-6 boys, some as young as 14, travel north to try their luck, and never come back.

The ramifications of this exodus go far beyond the economic. The video in the tape deck of the house where I am staying reads "Our Wedding" and even Irma's husband, 7 years and counting without so much as a word, maintains his presence with a prominently placed photograph

in her shop. Younger, and unmarried, a 13-year-old girl carries around a crumpled picture of the boy she likes, fittingly clad in sunglasses and a hoodie, who last year left for the United States, though she doesn't know where exactly.

The children sometimes ask about their fathers, and the women are at a loss as to what to say. To ask why is to unravel an entire complicated system that always deals them, the global poor, a bad hand. Irma says of her daughters, "The oldest remembers, but the smallest cannot remember the face of her dad." One exuberant, hyperactive 4-year old whose father did return, after finding himself an alcoholic in Queens, wears a shirt that reads "Only Little Kids Believe in America!"

If the sentiment seems bitter it is perhaps because for many emigration is not a choice. One of the results of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is that poverty is quick on the rise in Mexico. Since NAFTA's inception in 1994, an additional one million Mexicans now earn less than the minimum wage and eight million additional families have fallen below the poverty line, increasing the poverty estimate from 1/4 to 1/3 of the population. In the border zone, the ubiquitous sweatshops and factories have not provoked an increase in employment, but rather an increase in cases of hepatitis and birth defects due to pollution and chemical residues. Further south, the rich natural resources are being recklessly exploited, such that towns no longer can sustain themselves. In the state of Guerrero, about 40 percent of the forests have been destroyed in the past decade alone.

Some of the women have also had their stint trying to live out the American dream. Maria Dolores, a mother of two, lived — or rather, survived — in Los Angeles for five years. She worked in a factory sewing clothes where she was paid 50 cents per piece, earning at most \$30 a day. She was also a nanny for a while, where she received \$100 every week. Her attempts to save money were utterly fruitless. Paying her rent in addition to food, medical

costs and other expenses proved to suck dry every last penny of her meager pay.

The collective sense of abandonment is not hard to pick up on, but fortunately these women are not of the self-pitying kind. The fact that men play next to no active role in their lives has spawned an unusual version of feminism. "We are independent," Irma says. Among the human rights they consider to be the most important is the ability to "convivir," to live together. Sharing houses, food, chores, dance lessons and laughter, the women of this town have created a support network for each other, both economic and emotional, instead of waiting around for the next check from the United States that might not ever come.

Three of them started up a successful taco stand during lunch hour at the secondary school. On average they make 200 pesos before expenses, and end up splitting 100 at the end of the day. It isn't much, but it keeps the kids fed, and that is the most urgent goal. Beyond that, they are concerned as well with the future of their town and are working towards lessening the necessity of emigration for their sons and daughters.

This past October about 80 people from Rio de la Anona blockaded that highway with the tree and sign. With the support of a statewide organization of villages known as the Committee in Defense of the Rights of the People (CODEP), they demanded medical services and a high school, so that their children might have possibilities beyond wage slavery in foreign lands. To this end, a health center has since been built, as well as a library, and a high school is under construction, all with the materials they demanded from the government, and employing the small group of men that remain in the community ☆

Leanne lives in Bushwick, Brooklyn and is currently trying to woo a stray cat named Winifred into her humble home using cold milk and tuna fish. She likes olives and the roof. She can be reached at thefjordandetermity@yahoo.com

Crash-Course Economics by Tara Bracco

"Economics has been made to be confusing and intimidating. If people don't understand economics, then people feel it's best left up to the experts," says Emily Kawano, Executive Director of the Center for Popular Economics. "It's a form of control."

Since 1978, thousands of educators and activists from around the world have been taught by the Center for Popular Economics (CPE) to understand, critique, and evaluate the U.S. and the international economy. Based in Amherst, Massachusetts, CPE is a non-profit organization whose mission is to demystify the economy for individuals and groups. The organizations' signature program is its Summer Institute, an intensive week-long, crash-course in economics literacy that has been training activists for 26 years.

Over 50 people ranging in age from 20-70, from a variety of racial and socio-economic backgrounds, attend the Summer Institute. Participants are educators, labor union organizers, members of community groups, and people working with global justice groups. All participants recognize that understanding the economy is critical for effective activism so that people can engage in economic discussions and be in a better position to advocate for change.

Kieran Honderich, an AIDS activist and a CPE staff economist who has lectured at Harvard University, says, "CPE offers what no one else offers — a bridge between academic economics and activism. CPE's staff economists understand academic economics and translate it into tools for activists."

Classes at the Summer Institute are divided into two core courses, letting participants choose between studying the U.S. economy or the international economy. Students in the U.S. economy class study topics such as macroeconomics, wealth distribution, organized labor, and racial and gender inequality. Students in the international course study neo-liberalism, exchange rate speculation, international production, and capitalism and conflict. Subjects are taught with revealing insights into the people being served and the people being under-served by economic policies. In addition to the core courses, the Summer Institute also integrates panels

and workshops on one specific timely topic. Previous special track topics include healthcare and economic injustice, the prison industrial complex, and environmental justice.

CPE's approach is not dogmatic, and teachers draw on students' experiences to help explain the concepts. Carmel Kelly, a 25 year-old student who is majoring in nutrition at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, attended the August 2005 Summer Institute. "I had no idea I would get this kind of knowledge and connection to real life examples," says Kelly. "The program allowed me to come in and learn how these issues relate to my work, even though I had no experience in economics."

Dan Jaffee, who is currently writing a book on fair trade, also attended the August sessions. Jaffee says, "We discredited ourselves in political movements when we're incorrect and under-informed. I feel more prepared for activism now that I can use and understand the same terminology and concepts as a corporate CEO or World Bank economist."

Students are taught mainstream theories so that they can effectively critique claims by financial institutions, and explore a range of alternatives currently being used by people throughout the world. Peter van Schaick, a 59 year-old lawyer who represents whistleblowers, says, "CPE gave us a little tool bag with which to criticize the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund and to examine other economic possibilities."

Activists often leave CPE programs with hope and a newfound commitment to progressive social change. Kelly says, "It's totally inspired my current activism. It's connected me back to the core issues I care so much about."

"We comprise the economy," says Kawano. "If it's not serving a majority of people, we have a right and a responsibility to change it." ☆

For more information on the Summer Institute and CPE's other programs, visit www.populareconomics.org.

Tara Bracco is the founder of Poetic People Power and a Woodhull Associate Fellow.

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Starving in the Land of Plenty

Reverend Billy Predicts the Consumer Apocalypse

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sidebars **Eric Zassenhaus**

As consumerism infiltrates every inch of our lives through TV screens and soda machines, it has become savvier in covering new territory. Cleverly, it has crept into places we'd least suspect, and now thrives in the intangible. It has made political concepts almost non-existent for many people, or else skewed these ideas with product placements. We live in a culture where replicas of Che Guevara's jacket can be bought for several hundred dollars and anarchy is used to sell t-shirts. As product addiction becomes increasingly fervent, political awareness, creativity, and social responsibility begin to weaken. But there is a force working to free people from the sparkle and shine of new trends in advertising, and it is called the Church of Stop Shopping.

If people put as much energy into social issues and political identity as they did demanding refunds, imagine what progress the human race could be making.

Headed by anti-consumerism activist Reverend Billy, the Church is taking its robed choir into stores everywhere, not to sing the praises of god but to preach the need to get out of the aisles. Part street theatre, part direct action, Reverend Billy exorcises cash registers and spouts the sins of the store patrons as they browse through the racks. He leads demonstrations wherever a corporate retailer can be found and into the streets where communities have been broken because of them.

With his roots in acting, theatre producing, and a whole lot of waiting tables, Reverend Billy, a.k.a. Bill Talen, got his start in the late '70s in San Francisco, and later moved to New York. It was there that, in 1998, Talen developed the compellingly campy persona to carry out his "interventions." He's become well known to passersby, businesses, and police for his protests against companies that he believes are exploiting workers or consumers. He's banned for life from Starbucks and has been arrested numerous times, once outside Times Square's Disney store while trailing a Mickey Mouse statue behind that he had handcuffed himself to.

On the phone from his New York home, Talen says he wants people to think about who they're buying from, and to ease up on the shopping frenzy that has become commonplace in our society. Even in conversation the pompadour-styled preacher's sentences are punctuated by bursts of fist-pumping exclamatory shouts of "Amen!" But these interruptions from his alter ego only work to emphasize just how serious he is about the impact consumerism is having on people. He talks about the "nonsensical loop" it traps us in, keeping us in a false relationship with what's around us, ultimately leaving us alienated.

"We're surrounded by these plastic logos that are all the same," Talen ex-

horts. "We're surrounded by these supermodels that are producing in great multiplication across this society. After a while a community is hard to build when you're building in a world of constantly repeating images, constantly repeating language. A part of the strategy is to keep us dazzled and tired; keep our senses exhausted by repetition."

In his preaching, the Reverend's campy, gonzo style softens into earnestness: "People lose traction. They don't build meaning anymore with the environment that they're walking through because they don't have a mental grab on things. They start drifting and they get this other sort of fragmented dream-life. That kind of drifting makes us less political, less able to put together whole sentences, less able to create meaning... and people become more like tourists in their own lives."

It sometimes seems that people would rather surround themselves in the individualized attention that shopping provides. Most of us have been witness to or, on the receiving end of, customers who make ridiculous or irate demands over things like return policies or how a

OOPA-CHE!

Che Guevara's image is perhaps the most well-known symbol of individual rebellion in the world. In Cuba, where he helped overthrow the corrupt government of Batista in 1959, Che's image can be seen in most public buildings and along the walls of many streets. So iconic is the image that it has grown, ironically, into a merchandising empire unto itself. Che's image is now one of the most ubiquitous images used to further the consumer capitalist cartels he fought and died to overturn. In fact, there are several stores around the world and online devoted entirely to selling Che-related goods, including thechestore.com (now featuring a Malcolm X department of collectible under and activewear). Recently, Che's family and relatives of the original photographer of the image, Alberto "Korda" Diaz, have begun suing businesses who make use of Che's mug for profit. A 2001 campaign by Smirnoff was cut short by such litigation.



meal was served. If people put as much energy into social issues and political identity as they did demanding refunds, imagine what progress the human race could be making.

Twenty nine year-old Ciseo Ribas has worked in and out of the service industry since he was fifteen. "I think

KHAKI IS A STATE OF MIND

In the early 1990s, major corporations and the advertising firms that represent them realized they had struck something big when they began mining the "counterculture" for icons and sales hooks. Realizing they could hook a pair of pants by tying them to a cultural icon, The Gap launched a massive campaign to color the counterculture in khaki. Hence, "Kerouac wore Khakis," "Miles Davis wore Khakis." Even tragic heartthrob "James Dean wore Khakis." They neglected to mention that the style (and the term "khaki") came straight from the uniforms of the British imperial Raj in India, or that Hitler and Mussolini happened to be big khaki buffs as well.





BIG MAC DADDY

You would think that a high-rolling pimp like Ronald McDonald would have got into the hop hop game much, much earlier than he has. But, despite all the signs, McDonald's (oops, I mean *Mickey D's*) held out on exploiting the medium until fairly recently. Maven Strategies, which landed the McDonald's campaign, announced that the Don of Happy Meals will pay rappers to mention McDonald's "Big Mac" sandwich in their songs—from \$1 to \$5 for each time the song gets commercial airtime. Says the CEO of Maven Strategies, "Hip-hop's endorsement of different brands give them a cool factor and representation among youth. They gain credibility by being mentioned in songs." Word to your scary redheaded mother.



we have created a vacuum where we are now a completely bored culture," he says. Ribas's service experience has ranged from working on the sales floor at Wal-Mart to late nights at a busy bar in downtown Toronto, Canada. "We need to entertain ourselves only through that level. To watch a movie, go to a club or a bar, to do anything, you have to pay for it. Everything we buy is created by somebody else. Why don't we create our own entertainment? Why are stores so packed on Saturdays? Because it's a day off, and on days off people go shopping instead of going swimming or flying a kite. They actually go and stand in front of the mirrors."

In this climate of co-optation, social movements and street culture have become fuel for multi-million dollar indus-

tries. Shoes, jewelry, cosmetics, clothing — the list of products that have been spun off from once credible youth movements is endless. When consumer-culture jamming becomes a marketing campaign in disguise, it's sometimes impossible to tell what is a grassroots movement and what is just helping things to move along. Using one of his favorite targets, Starbucks, as an example, Talen points out that artistic revolution has been turned into a marketing campaign for the coffee chain. In New York City, Starbucks has been plastering the streets with ads that claim to promote the arts. But here, it is the rebellious cultural movements that have popularized coffee culture — Dadaism, Surrealism, the Beat movement — that are clearly being used to promote a particularly pernicious coffee chain. Starbucks,

continued next page

In this climate of co-optation, social movements and street culture have become fuel for multi-million dollar industries. Shoes, jewelry, cosmetics, clothing — the list of products that have been spun off from once credible youth movements is endless.

Not only have we become de-politicized, we have confused advertising with reality, with spirituality.

Talen emphasizes, promotes savvy marketing, not revolution.

This certainly isn't the only example of cultural resistance made corporate. Subcultures that the general public once saw as inherently threatening—like punk and hip hop—are, for many, now just so many reasons to go shopping. The words “revolution” and “rebel” have been used to sell everything from computers to pet care products. Even “guerilla” is fast becoming predominantly a marketing term, rather than a political tactic. The recent venture by Vancouver, British Columbia retailer Campbell McDougall epitomizes the way we market mindsets. His “guerilla” menswear store, Komakino, features designer label clothing, and will change locations every six to twelve months. Each location will be reinvented as an art installation, and McDougall's aim is to take his high-end store “back to being

more underground and real...and make it all about the product. The inspiration comes from a D.I.Y. post-punk ethos and an early '90s Berlin-like attitude,” he says.

Talen says that now products are almost an afterthought; stores have become an “advert-topia” where people aren't just there to shop, they're there for an experience. Not only have we become de-politicized, we have confused advertising with reality, with spirituality.

Obviously, many dangers come from the commodification of political identity. It leaves us with a sense of hopelessness, breaks down our communities, and distorts our reality. Efforts to move toward social changes and common goals fall to the side as people are more than willing to seek empowerment in the role of consumer, where the old adage still applies: “the customer is always right.” As marketers become increasingly aggressive in their search for the next big thing,

cultural movements become harder to establish. There's barely time for anything to catch on before it's turned into an ad campaign.

Talen sees a mystery in how such an absurd environment has become the norm. But it's an enigma he won't give up on. Despite the product daze

people have become caught up in, Talen believes each one of us is “brilliant... we've just had our brilliance outmaneuvered.” He sees the sale on our society nearing its final days soon. But is this rise of individualism reversible, or are the mental consequences of living in a world that lets us think we can have whatever we want, when we want it, going to have a lasting impact?

“I believe we're very close to the revolution,” Talen says. “I think that we're very close to people just standing up and just walking out of Starbucks. We're very close to that moment. In the not-so distant future people will look back to the turn of the millenium when things became so consumerised and we will ask ourselves: how did they fool us for so long? How did they call that freedom? How did they call that democracy? How did they call that choice? How did they call those petroleum products good foods? That bright orange package was all it took. *That's all it took?* No, our natural brilliance, our souls within us, we're going to get our bodies back, we're going to get our minds back. It's gonna happen very soon. The revolution that is not content for the product revolution is about to happen. Amen!” ★

Liz Worth is a freelance writer and co-host of CKLN's 12-Inch Voices.

12X(ploit)U!

In the early '80s, DC punk developed a style and political ethos that viciously attacked the increasingly corporate environment surrounding it. Witness the issue at bottom, the discography of DC punkers Minor Threat, featuring the lead singer Ian Mackaye on its cover. Mackaye himself would go on to organize countless concerts raising awareness on everything from animal exploitation to cronyism in local politics to sweatshop labor.

Witness (top image) Nike's new campaign for its 2005 skateboarding tour “unintentionally” borrowing the image from Minor Threat's album, slapping a pair of Nikes on the performer, Ian Mackaye, whose campaigns have attacked the labor practices that Nike makes use of. After a wave of angry emails and calls, Nike apologized and rescinded the poster, but the audacity of such a campaign is truly mind-blowing, and one can't help thinking, a truly strategic way to attempt to discredit long-time activists who get in Nike's way.



THINK DISRESPECTED

When Apple designed its ad campaign to slightly update their corporate brand identity, they knew they'd struck gold with the concept of using cultural icons from zany puppeteer Jim Hensen, fiercely independent boxer Mohammed Ali, squat firebrand painter Pablo Picasso, underdog organizer Cesar Chavez, and frizzle-haired genius Albert Einstein, among others, to encourage us all to “Think Different” in exactly the same way — by buying Apple products.





The Simple Life

navigating simplicity and voluntary poverty at Boston's Haley House

words Anna Clark
photos Katie Jumper

Thoreau quotes are slapped onto calendars, date books, bumper stickers, mugs, T-shirts, bags, and Hallmark cards: "I say, let your affairs be two or three....," he proclaims. Or, more to the point, "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!" Most of us look upon these familiar turns of phrase and think, *Yes*.

After paging through my super-highlighted edition of *Walden*, I might spend an afternoon, an evening, a day, a weekend, and purge my closet. "I still own this?" "I guess I can do without this." After filling a Hefty bag or two, I exhale and reflect on how much better it is to have a simpler life. The books will go to a library, the clothes to Goodwill. And I feel good about my life — liberated, even.

But once the self-congratulation quiets, it comes to simple observations. If I lament my country's over consumption, how do I justify buying a new book when there's a nearby library? Why can I afford to eat out the same day I tell a canvassing environmental group "sorry, I've nothing to spare?"

Ready to raise the stakes of simplicity, I left Michigan for Boston's Haley House, a live-in community of volunteers based on the Catholic Worker Movement's ideals of personalism and social justice. Their mission is to work in the space between privileged and non-privileged, operating the only soup kitchen in Boston without an armed guard, along with a food pantry, organic farm, affordable housing units, a bakery-café that doubles as a job-training program, and hosting the street magazine *What's Up*.

Judy met me at the train station in January. A community member now in her 50s, she sold her home and a life's worth of possessions to permanently commit to Haley House. As we blustered through the South End, she gestured to the pretty brownstones. When Haley

House opened in 1966, she said, the neighborhood was a "war zone." People sleeping on sidewalks — and there were many — were invited inside. Buildings were chipping away. But not long ago came the transformation. Now, when I tell other Boston acquaintances where I live, they say "wow."

"The buildings are worth millions of dollars," Judy informed me. "Millions."

Why, I asked, hadn't Haley House sold its building for an astronomical profit, moved shop to the poorer Roxbury district, and used the money for some noble cause?

Judy said not selling was actually nobler. "I believe we're a prophetic presence," she answered. "We break up economic segregation. People who live here don't forget us."

"Do neighbors volunteer with us?" I asked.

"Some."

People pass through Haley House — volunteers, urban immersions, and high school and college students on spring break. Visitors are interested in the community's how'd-you-end-up-here stories. I'm consistently fascinated by Adam Campbell's; his experiences highlight my simultaneous frustration and fondness for the community's ideal of "voluntary poverty" in a particularly dramatic way. Though I'd heard the tale in person, I later discovered he'd kept a journal during his first visit to Haley House:

I came... to give the live-in community a try for a couple weeks, he writes in one of the earlier entries. Which went famously, save one issue.... working in the soup kitchen, I felt this nagging reality that there was a palpable barrier between myself and the "guests." And no matter how many times I ate with them or they beat me in chess, we lived on two totally different sides of the counter.... I still had no idea why they were there, what they did during the day, what the other shelters and service providers were like, if/how they could make it out...

Haley House live-ins rely on the same food bank we use in the soup kitchen. Nobody gets paid, and we're left to our own devices in scrambling for medical insurance, if we feel we need it at all. Despite offers, we've never accepted a dishwasher. Members are urged to leave most possessions behind upon moving in.

At a typical breakfast, one guest starts up the coffee, another proffers a CD to play, still others make toast to tide their stomachs until the meal is served. William and I hash out the latest *Harry Potter*. I read headlines with Don and salsa dance with a man who calls himself, with a smirk, Batman. There're the dishes, the sleepiness, the MIA volunteer, the occasional clogged toilet, but truthfully, it's fun. The meals are not the point, after all. The point is the formation of real community among individuals who, in this society, are typically isolated from each other.

But there's the other part.

One afternoon I went to CVS and there's Tony holding a cup for customers to toss him change. Most pretend he's invisible. And I, too, wish I'd ducked away before he'd seen me. I'm embarrassed to see him begging. I say hi. Tony's irritated because earlier someone stole his cup and its 30 dollars. It's

a casual conversation. I commiserate. I like Tony. But then, there's that cup hanging heavy between us. I soon head inside to spend my money to develop photos, dropping nothing into Tony's cup.

Wary of this "other part," Adam's response was to push further in attempt to erase the divide:

Seeing mystery as invitation and seeking understanding through experience, my response was to go homeless for a week in Boston. Ya, ya: "Campbell, don't be ridiculous. Just by the nature of your privilege, the fact that you can back out at any time, and by only going for a week totally preempts you from having any sort of genuine 'homeless' experience." Well, better than nothin...

The plan: to leave Haley House Wed. morning and "be homeless" for a week, whatever that meant. To survive the streets of Boston with relatively nothing, to be part of the invisible subculture, to experience life from the other side of the counter. No keys, no money, no I.D., no info...

Though Thoreau has become the poster boy of American simple living, the idea has much older roots. Jesus invited disciples to be spiritually "like children," and famously said that it's easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter heaven. Buddhism asks us to simply take what is for what is, without burdening it with cravings, narrations, expectations, or disappointment. In Hinduism, the third life stage, *vanaprastha*, is marked by increased detachment, implying that simplicity is a natural state.

Each tradition holds that things and things-to-do distract us from a more authentic reality. But despite the affirmations we might apply to the worth of a simple life, the fact is that, for most of us, not doing anything in particular is reserved for vacations and retreats. Material simplicity translates into closet purges.

A taxi driver pointed me the right way to the Pine Street Inn, a homeless shelter ... and eventually I found it, but had missed breakfast. So they gave me directions to St. Francis, another service provider 15 minutes away. But by the time I found it, they had also stopped serving ...

St. Francis... held us outside 45 minutes longer than the posted 11:30 lunch start. [It] smelled like the high school cafeteria on Thursdays, with its too sugary tomato sauce pizza. Once I cleared the bag check and metal detector, I entered the rather non-descript chow room: packed out capacity of around eighty, dominated by middle-aged African-American men. A tense space, loaded with transience and testosterone. Bags stashed around the room, minimal eye contact, hurried eating void of enjoyment."

In Haley House, it's true, some things are simple. It's also true that we have a DVD player, stereo, and computer (all donated). Most of us have cell phones. We can leave this "poverty" whenever we choose. I miss books and paychecks. I worry about student loans. I hate rummaging through half-rotten food, and I



... who said simplicity is just about doing away with material goods? As utopian as they sound, neither community life nor working with the poor automatically equate to "living the simple life." Between our daily shifts and endless essential tasks, we're as crazed as we'd be working traditional jobs.

supplement my meals with eat-out fare I can't afford. And who said simplicity is just about doing away with material goods? As utopian as they sound, neither community life nor working with the poor automatically equate to "living the simple life." Between our daily shifts and endless essential tasks, we're as crazed as we'd be working traditional jobs.

But then, are the guests who time days to soup kitchen schedules and shelter bed lotteries, who worry where to store their few possessions and struggle with illness and addiction: are they living a simple life?

On the hill, by the statue, overlooking the active open area in a spot of practical invisibility lies a dirty bomb ground zero marked by the blanket/cardboard/trash shrapnel. The bodies responsible, who call themselves 'the family', number around twenty...

The family is amazingly kind, and loyal to each other to the end. They are protective, yet welcoming, and have Boston dialed. They inform me how to get free rides on the subway and the silver line (bus), free clothes/food/shelter, where and where not to sleep ... At one point during my day with them, 'Jack' tried to give me a nickname to make me an 'official' member of the family. Luckily he was drunk enough to easily distract. Getting in too deep with a fiercely loyal and subtly paranoid group, and then suddenly disappearing, and then reemerging for the rest of the year in a homeless service provider... well, let's just say this isn't a group you want thinking you crossed/abandoned. Better to befriend for a day on a wandering path...

On Wednesdays I operate the food pantry. It's like playing grocery store without money and great fun. But it's odd: as I give people food, I receive gifts. Divina gave me an embroidered skirt. Alycia gave me handmade jewelry that, she promises, grants the protection of saints. Last week a bracelet came wrapped in a prescription pill bottle and tissue. And Konstantine tucks poems into my hand that, he says, are also being sent to the Pope.

In his journal, Adam speaks of how the homeless he knew seemed to share "an amplified concern for survival, spit up from the surrounding sea of abundance":

A friend I met in the soup kitchen who had made it out called it the 'dark consciousness,' and when enveloped by it, when forced to think only of survival day in and out, it is impossible to think beyond food/clothes/shelter to job/joy/peace, and anyone shouting or thinking 'get a job' only exposes the ignorance to such a state. This particular guy, by the way, was now choosing to remain on the streets though he had money for a house. His reasoning? Having survived the streets and made it out, he has chosen to dedicate his life to helping the homeless. But he spoke of seeing others succumb to the drastic allure of money, of surrounding themselves with house and opulence (relatively speaking), and forgetting about the people in need. They began to choose things over people and safety over life, and soon they spent all their time protecting what they had, without realizing that now, forgoing experience, they had nothing to give.

I won't pretend I understand what it's like to live in a tunnel, as one fellow I know does, any more than I understand what it's like for a friend to lose her mother. But despairing the ultimate limitations of empathy or of living simply is too often an excuse to not move in that direction at all. The gap between rich and poor is so deeply entrenched in this world that it seems insurmountable. While the problem is big, it shouldn't be mistaken for complex. The solution is, in fact, simple.

We can share our surplus with those who don't have enough. It sounds too easy to be revolutionary, but, as can see from our own lives, we have the ability to make sharing the default rather than the exception. And while many fight for this on a macro level, it deserves to be built into everyday life and actions as well. In fact, it's necessary.

At Haley House, it's not our "voluntary poverty" that builds solidarity with our guests. We connect with people when we're unafraid to take our friendships out of the soup kitchen and into the streets. Then we're making the connections that make this world toward the place we know it can be. *This* is a liberated life in process. ☆

Anna once got in six car accidents in five months. Talk about excessive. She can be reached at annaleighclark@yahoo.com.

At 5:29 a.m. on July 16, the 60th anniversary of the first nuclear bomb test, the Simnuke Project re-created the blast as a commemoration and reminder of the on-going threat of these weapons. "Entire generations have lived under the threat of the bomb," Project organizer Camron Assadi said, introducing the event, "and there are 30,000 nuclear warheads in the world today. The Trinity detonation was a moment that changed the world forever. The genie was let out of the bottle." He then asked the crowd to watch the demonstration quietly and to reflect on the meaning of the commemoration.

A crowd of about a hundred people watched silently as the red, orange, and black mushroom cloud rolled 300 feet up into the dawn sky, reflecting the destructive power unleashed so many years ago. Even from 100 yards away, the heat from the fireball was strong. It was frightening to think this was only 1/10,000 of the 19-kiloton power of the actual Trinity bomb.

Those who witnessed the explosion had braved the 105-degree heat to drive up to the remote desert near Pyramid Lake, Nevada. Most had driven from San Francisco, though a few came much further, having heard about the project through the city's industrial art community. Some were motivated to come to support the event's intrinsic political statement. Others were drawn to the opportunity to see some amazing fire-art.

Like the project it reproduces, Simnuke was in some ways the unintentional product of experimentation — the result of playing with fire. Fire is an integral part of art for the community of San Francisco-based artists Assadi works with. A lot of their pieces are made for Burning Man, one of the few places where art with flame-throwers and fire cannons is welcome, so when the Simnuke group found the giant fire-suppression fans at an urban recycler for next to nothing, they decided to see what would happen when they injected fuel instead of foam. What they got was a column of fire that shot up and then curled back on itself forming a mushroom shape. Inspired by *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, Richard Rhodes' Pulitzer Prize-winning book on the Manhattan Project, Assadi started thinking about the possibilities of merging art, performance, and politics to make a statement about the birth of the nuclear age. "I realized the anniversary of Trinity was coming up," Assadi said, "and it seemed like a very important time to do it."

From idea to execution, the project was three years in the making. It ultimately took six big fans, 400 gallons of fuel, about \$20,000, and well over a thousand man-hours from a crew of fifteen people working on everything from welding and pipe-bending to technical and engineering tasks. Dave Bayer, a computer consultant with a background in physics and one of the main Simnuke technical consultants, was drawn to the project as he saw it develop. "At first I got involved because I found the project technically interesting, but as the project unfolded, Bush announced the development of 'bunker buster' tactical nukes." Bayer's involvement took a more political turn. "[T]here is no such thing as a safe

tactical nuke," he says.

Once the project was built, it was obvious the only safe place to detonate a fireball of this size would be in the alkali flats of the nearby Nevada desert, meaning only a handful of people would be able to witness the actual event. The

Simnuke group worked with the Cloud Factory Art collective to widen the project, curating a nuclear-age themed art exhibit at the Rx Gallery in San Francisco and a memorial planting of 60 trees at Los Alamos to emphasize the commemoration aspect of the performance and draw a wider audience towards Simnuke's message.

But the creators and participants in the Simnuke Project realize how difficult it is to get a message across in a media-saturated landscape, and some are very pessimistic about the possibilities of this kind of activism to change minds.

"I think a lot of people in the broader audience will view [the Simnuke Project] as a spectacle," said Will Francis. "Will it change anything? Unfortunately, probably not."

Bayer was more optimistic about the message reaching its mark. "Some did dismiss us as just making a fireball for the fun of it, but in most places I saw people rebutting this attitude later in the discussion, sometimes pointing to the surrounding work, sometimes tying it into the event being a commemoration."

It's difficult to know how many people the Simnuke message was able to reach, although a good indicator is the traffic the project generated through its website. According to Assadi "I exceeded the bandwidth limit on my simnuke.org account by a lot in July. I was glad to see that people were reading about the project but also the message — the 'why' we did it. And reading comments from all over the world was gratifying."

Although it's hard to know much of the underlying message reached the broader media audience, Bayer believes Simnuke was at least successful in another important aspect — energizing and inspiring other artists and activists to think about communicating in new and creative ways. ★

Laura Hauther is a freelance journalist, activist and social worker. She has an internet radio show "I Like Being Killed" on Killradio.org Sundays 6:30-8:00pm.

SIMNUKE

words Laura Hauther
photo William Francis



OUTSIDE(R) ART

words Chris Cobb
photo Julio Cesar Martinez

Artists-in-Residence Scavenge for Materials and a Message at San Francisco's Dump

Humans are the only creatures on earth that generate garbage. All other life on earth has no concept of such a thing. Insects, spiders, trees, bacteria, other animals, and even viruses leave nothing behind except what can be used again. "Garbage," as a concept, was invented by human beings.

And it so happens that trash, refuse, crap, stuff, waste, whatever you want to call it - is an indelible part of American culture, where consumption is believed to be a virtue, even a right. However, almost two hundred years of unfettered consumption has led to the potential overflow of countless millions of tons of solid waste around the United States. Landfills, after all, can hold only so much. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 236,200,000 tons of solid waste was thrown away in 2003 alone, the most recent year for which data is available. That's equivalent to more than 4.6 pounds of trash per American per day. Numbers like these are what caused the California state legislature to pass a statute in 1989 requiring all counties to recycle 50% of their solid waste by the year 2000. Since then, California's cities have struggled to meet the mandate.

San Francisco, however, has surpassed the mandate, now recycling about 65% of its waste. One reason might be because of the Artist In Residence (AIR) program at the county dump. Conceived in 1990 the innovative art program has be-

come one of the most popular and successful around. It's a fine example of how art can help educate people in interesting and inspiring ways.

"The program aims to inspire the public by having exhibits where people can see some creative ways that waste materials can be reused," says current Director Paul Fresnia. Located across 44 acres, SF Recycling & Disposal, Inc. manages the Public Disposal Area, (commonly referred to as the dump), where every day, seven days a week, over three hundred loads of waste are hauled. Across from this stands the 2,000-square-foot art studio for the artists-in-residence.

Fresnia seems genuinely interested in allowing for the unusual and unexpected, not wanting to interfere with the creative process. In fact, one perk for artists accepted to the program is that they have 24-hour access to materials in the Public Disposal Area. Although it's not clear whether any of the artists could be found digging around for material at four in the morning, it presents an interesting possibility. "Many artists find and recycle materials in their art," Fresnia notes. "But no one else has this much material to pick from."

This is the challenge the dump is up against: How can they convey the drastic nature of the problem without rolling off a series of massive figures or easily dismissible statistics? How can they communicate the urgent need for people to view "things" as having their own life in the world? One example

above: Andrew Junge and his life-size Hummer made completely of recycled styrofoam

... by presenting the unwanted as beautiful, artists are challenging the cultural concept as well as the language of waste. It makes sense to have artists there, mining this almost sacred place, pouring over peoples' things, using what now has no function.

Fresnia mentioned is a perfectly good, working piano that someone had thrown out. "The only thing broken on it was the pedal, which probably wasn't broken until they took it off the truck," he says. It was almost buried in a landfill but because of the program it might yet live again. "We're hoping that some future artist will incorporate it into their residency some day. It's in good shape."

The dump resembles a large, messy thrift store or an open-air flea market but with one important distinction – the artists who work there get to make art with anything they find – for free. "During my residency I saw people throw away brand new items, still in the packaging," says former artist-in-residence Dee Hibbert-Jones. "Painting canvasses, drinking glasses in (their) original boxes, new shoes, first edition books, rings, almost new bikes ... so many things that could be reused. The guys on the line [the employees at the waste facility] pull out as much of this stuff as they can ... but so much goes by it's overwhelming. The whole experience is overwhelming."

Dealing directly with the topic of over-consumption, Andrew Junge, (artist-in-residence 2005) made an installation called "You Can't Have it All (Where Would You Put it)," by stacking dozens of old suitcases, hat boxes, trunks, cases and containers together. In this work, Junge investigates the potential value of the things he finds. "Objects have power, they are invested with meaning and purpose by their makers," he says. "They carry with them stories of past use, past users, and often a history we, as their temporary custodians, can only guess at."

Undeniably there is a whole psychology of shame and guilt built into throwing things away. The dump contains mountains of material destined for oblivion; an accumulation of countless things that people wish to forget. Such a place is, by definition, our society's destination for the unwanted and the useless. Those emotionally charged states of being also have corresponding symbolic language - from "feeling down in the dumps" to "taking a dump" to being "dumped." It's no surprise that unloading all of your emotional baggage onto someone is called "dumping on them." Perhaps a dump is not so much a physical place as it is a metaphor.

It shouldn't be overlooked that the dump is hidden away in an isolated part of San Francisco—an empty 44 acre city within the city. A collective unconscious dreamworld where nothing belongs to anybody and meanings are only coincidental. In the words of pre-Surrealist author, Comte de Lautremont - it is perhaps one of the only places in existence "as beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting table of an

umbrella and a sewing machine." It is artists that can draw out the beauty of what Lautremont spoke of - the beauty of coincidences.

But by presenting the unwanted as beautiful, artists are challenging the cultural concept as well as the language of waste. It makes sense to have artists there, mining this almost sacred place, pouring over peoples' things, using what now has no function. "I don't think anyone can go through the program without having their views of what is thrown away completely altered," says Hibbert-Jones. And that is precisely why artists were brought there in the first place. Because many artists make due with very little money and sparse resources, they are able to see everything around them as possible art materials.

At the dump, Fresnia and others, such as Art Coordinator Deborah Munk, want to share that sense of possibility with visitors. By connecting artists with resources they have turned the residency into a dynamic teaching tool that resonates with the public.

Every month artists-in-residence speak to groups that come to tour the facility. Over the past fifteen years SF Recycling & Disposal, Inc. (the organization that runs the dump) has had over fifty artists-in-residence. Each artist has helped educate by using their experiences there as an example.

Sharon Siskin (artist in residency through 2004), says, "The sewing machine and the hand drill along with shopping carts filled with possibilities were all I needed to inspire the process and production of sixty-five new works." She also mentioned how her time there has affected her art practice. "In my own life I, now, more than ever before, reduce what I consume, reuse what I'd already used and recycle everything else."

In many ways it's hard for American consumers to come to terms with the effects of their consumption. Despite our government's denial of global warming and its withdrawal from environmental treaties such as the Kyoto Protocol, it's clear the way humans deal with nature must change. Seeing nature as a paradise of unlimited resources has led to the devastation of countless plant and animal species around the world. But as the peace movement of the 1960s and the environmental movement of the 1970s has shown us, real change happens one person at a time.

At its best, artwork created at the dump directly addresses how nature is dealt with in the urban environment. Artist-in-residence Hector Dio Mendoza, for example, created a life-sized tree from discarded pieces of styrofoam packaging. By using what was meant to be thrown away and then creating a natural form out of it, he is calling attention to both waste and nature simultaneously. Because its very existence confronts such complex issues, the work is a powerful teaching tool.

Programs like the Artist in Residency Program at the San Francisco dump are a great step in that direction. In effect, they are ambitiously trying to redefine "things" and our cultural assumptions about "garbage," changing peoples' minds, one person, one artwork, at a time. ★

Chris Cobb is an artist and writer who lives in San Francisco. His articles and photographs have appeared in Leonardo Magazine, FLASH Art, ArtWeek, and others.

murmurs

Chris Hannah a.k.a. Glen Lambert of Propagandhi

photo by Jon Schledewitz / kickitilbreaks.com

what we're talking about

[PRINT]

Class Matters: Cross-Class Alliance Building for Middle Class Activists

Betsy Leondar-Wright
New Society Publishers, 2005
www.newsociety.com

While activists are often eager to process issues of race, sexual identity, and gender, discussion about class often remains taboo. Many progressives prefer not acknowledge that members of the working class are often "organized" by college educated members of the middle class. Examine the staff roster of almost any major union, and you'll probably find many young, educated idealistic souls. While no one can argue with their passion and commitment, they often make gaffes along the way, sometimes inadvertently alienating the members of the working class they hope to serve.

Betsy Leondar-Wright, a seasoned activist who serves as the Communications Director of United for a Fair Economy, asks the questions many dodge. Her central question is this: how can middle class activists best collaborate and build bridges with lower income organizers? Leondar-Wright draws on interviews with a diverse group of activists, including a woman who describes herself as a "young working-class white lesbian," "an African American man from a working-class background," and a man who calls himself "a garden variety white guy with three kids and a mortgage." She also contributes several essays that draw on her experiences, and is unafraid to share anecdotes about her initial failure to include working class white men in her interviews and her slips of the tongue where she accidentally insulted fellow change agents.

The book is most useful for activists starting to work with low-income populations and unsure how to proceed. She shares tips from low income activists about pet peeves and things they appreciate about middle class allies, and her snapshots of different communities and how they've been maligned by middle class activist "professionals" are eye-opening. She repeatedly points out the need to respect different life experiences, share stories, and not to make assumptions based on race and education level.

If this book were to be read with a companion piece, I would suggest Michelle Tea's anthology *Without a Net: The Female Experience of Growing Up Poor*. As in Tea's book, Leondar-Wright's interview subjects point out the obvious: if you want working class women in your organization, pay attention to issues of transportation and childcare. Don't assume that everyone wants to be middle class, or adopt the visual markers of the middle class. Not all white working class men are Archie Bunker. College students don't always have all the answers.

My only pet peeve about the book is the layout: stories are usually chopped up and cartoons and text boxes are inserted; it almost looks like a magazine. Aside from the one small quibble, the book is an excellent read for activists who want to be more sensitive to class issues and contains a fantastic selection of resources and discussion questions as a guide for starting conversations.

-Cortney Harding

Godlike: A Novel

Richard Hell
Akashic Books, 2005
www.akashicbooks.com

Richard Hell, an originator of punk with bands like Television, the Heartbreakers and his own Voidoids, has es-

tablished himself as an accomplished writer in the last 15 years. Hell, who defined NYC's first-gen punks as a 'blank generation,' has released his second novel – the story of a New York poet Paul and his affair with young, fiery poet T. Paul, writing from a psyche ward, tells the story in the form of a memoir through the ebbs and flows of medication and mood swings. I was extremely impressed by Hell's writing. Some of the freer sections are reminiscent of the stream-of-consciousness experiments of Burroughs and Kerouac. Hell has a unique voice for Paul, allowing the reader to look deeply into the soul of a dying poet looking back at himself and T's turbulent relationship in the drug-soaked early 70's. 'Godlike' is a beautifully sad book that is incredibly written.

-Jan Adcock

A Short History of Progress

Ronald Wright
Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2005
www.carrollandgraf.com

Civilization is living beyond its means. Mother Nature is underwriting the market messianism and hyper-consumption emblematic of our age, and her accounts are rapidly, dangerously, depleting.

Ronald Wright's lucid and compelling *A Short History of Progress* offers a warning to those would blithely continue down this road. Chronicling the rise and fall of earlier civilizations, Wright makes a convincing argument that we are not immune to the errors of the past. Rapacity, greed, and a stubborn blindness to the consequences of actions have led cultures as varied as Sumer, the Roman Empire, Easter Island and the Maya to destroy themselves — suicides, essentially, along the ways of progress — and by no means can we consider them exceptions.

The danger today is that a single, globalized civilization covers almost the entire world, and therefore we may not survive another collapse. In the past there were other fields to be cultivated, new continents to be discovered, seemingly infinite resources to be squandered. No more. The world economy — an estimate of humanity's load on nature — has increased forty-fold in the last hundred years; the human population has only quadrupled. Despite what the Bushies tell us, we no longer have the luxury of unconcern. The author notes that only a billion of us could likely feed ourselves if industrial civilization were to founder — something that should be keeping us up at night.

In spite of the evidence, however, optimism pervades. In our mythology of progress, humanity believes that we are getting smarter, more enlightened, and more ethical — in a word, better — than those "savages" who came before. In our hubris, we believe we cannot make the same mistakes: We, with our technology and skeptical post-modernism, have come too far. To this, Wright replies: "At the gates of the Colosseum and the concentration camp, we have no choice but to abandon hope that civilization is, in itself, a guarantor of moral progress." Nothing more need be said.

Our lunatic view of progress may someday kill us all. President Kennedy once stated that "mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind." He was speaking of the frightening internal logic of technological advancement, the "progress traps," as Wright calls them, that may very well lead to catastrophe. A hundred years ago our bombs could destroy cities; today they can destroy the world. Can we really call that "progress?"

Humankind is currently content "robbing the future to pay the present," though this will inevitably lead us into a new Dark Age, if not a new Stone Age. (The previous Stone Age lasted 99.5% of human existence; these times are something of an aberration.) Humanity must abandon its myths of progress and civilization, set economic limits, restrain our consumptive impulses. Wright is not overly optimistic about our chances; we are, in his opinion, "clever, but seldom wise." For the sake of our species, I hope he's wrong.

-Kandice Ardiel

Why Are We Reading Ovid's Handbook on Rape? Teaching and Learning at a Women's College

Madeleine Kahn

Paradigm Publishers, 2005

www.paradigmpublishers.com

The scene: a women's college, mid-1990s. In a literature class the students are reading Ovid's *Metamorphoses* when one student lividly asks, "Why are we reading

a handbook on rape?" That is, why are we reading a text where female characters are being literally raped (like Philomela in Ovid's "Story of Tereus, Procne and Philomela") or metaphorically stripped of their personhood (Echo withers into a voice that can only repeat Narcissus; Daphne, to escape Apollo, mutates into a tree). Madeleine Kahn's examination attempts to answer her student's question as readers eavesdrop on classroom discussions of various texts, including Charlotte Charke's eighteenth-century memoir and Linda Lovelace's *Ordeal*.

Kahn starts from the point of view of the conventional teacher whose objective is to gear her students toward effective analytic thinking — namely, how to frame a logical argument and communicate it clearly — concepts that these students describe as the earmarks of a patriarchal education that oppresses them. When they read books, they are looking for narratives with strong-minded, determined heroines who are counterparts to them and offer them role models for how to live their lives — a need that takes precedence over literary context. When the students read Charlotte Charke, they interpret her as a twentieth-century woman. When they examine Charlotte Lennox's novel *The Female Quixote* and meet Arabella who thoroughly creates an alternate world for herself, they champion her, and go as far as assert that the power of their beliefs can overtake reality. As Maria, one of the more outspoken personalities in the class, puts it: "That wall isn't real unless I say so."

While the students resoundingly disregard scholarly frameworks, they increasingly turn the classroom topics to the deeply personal events of their lives. The discussion of Charlotte Charke leads a woman to confess unresolved conflicts with her mother; in the dialogue about Ovid, a student reveals she's been raped; in examining Linda Lovelace's *Ordeal*, another student admits to working as a prostitute. With such fervently candid exchanges, these undergraduates alter the energy of the classroom, along with Kahn's perceptions. We watch her step back from a central authorititarian role as students talk their way from initially explosive reactions to the beginnings of literary theses. They forge sustaining connections with each other while they deconstruct old notions about gender roles, authorial intent and the functions of narrative. In the chapter on Linda Lovelace and her violent sexual experiences, the discussions take students from a realm of conflicted emotions about pornography to an intelligently argued, expanded definition of feminism.

The author deftly initiates an academic conversation on the "proper" versus "improper" reading of literature as she guides her students to a shrewd scrutiny of texts and the questions those texts raise about misogyny, history and popular culture. Since John Dewey there have been educators who embrace this kind of creative, student-centered learn-

ing, teachers who guide the raw rants of students into an intellectual query — less common are books such as Kahn's that intimately demonstrate the transformation.

-Michelle Humphrey

Paying for It: A Guide by Sex Workers for Their Clients.

Greta Chnstina, Editor

Greenery Press, 2005

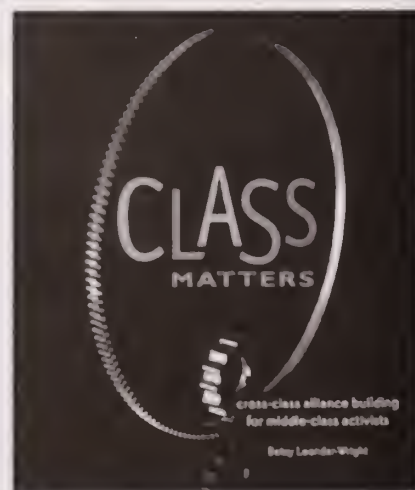
www.greenerypress.com

Sex workers are often demonized, looked down on, and forced to deal with overused inaccurate stereotypes. Their clients have similar image problems. Guys who call phone sex lines, who visit strip clubs or who want someone in leather to beat them, must be creeps because they pay for sexual experiences. They are assumed pathological, strange, unattractive, sexually dysfunctional, or all of the above. But sometimes these negative assumptions are direct result of their own behavior. Now there is a book to help change those problems! *Paying For It* generally assumes the best of all people who hire sex workers, that they don't WANT to be jerks — they simply don't know better. Now we can read up on all the tips, straight from the minds of the people we employ, all the do's and don't's that make for a more enjoyable experience for both sides.

What's that you say? This book doesn't apply to you? Don't be so sure. I fancy myself a respectful, "with it" guy, but I still learned a few tricks of the trade.

This collection of essays has 26 different writers from various branches of the sex worker trade, one I didn't know existed: paying an erotic writer to create an original fantasy story. While each essay emphasized different issues of the client dynamic, few of them directly contradicted each other's advice and when certain advice repeats again and again, you realize poor hygiene has reached epidemic proportions in this country.

Cleo DuBois's essay on e-mailing a dominatrix gives explicit examples of bad and good, explaining the difference, and why writing an informative, respectful, and detailed e-mail isn't solely for the domme's benefit. "Dear John," a piece by transwoman prostitute, is the most illuminating in the book because it details exactly how frequently the fantasy her clients have is so far removed from the reality of her own sexuality. Joy James writes confidently and matter-of-factly about the distance to reveal the paradox and struggles of her work. "The Guide to Peep Show" discusses explicitly how clients' behavior affects the experience, telling how being neutral or nervous can come off as being bored or antagonistic, and if you aren't having any fun, neither will the person dancing on the platform.



Hiring a sex worker is about getting exactly what you want when you want it, but that doesn't mean you are hiring a psychic or a robot. Sex work is like any other service industry. The greatest strength of the book is showing the other side of the glass: offering an insider's guide to the sex industry and all the perils and joys and annoyances that come with it (like any other job). While the guide intends to improve the interactions between sex workers and clients, it also challenges the unbalanced view our society has of both sex workers and the people who hire them.

-Raymond Johnson

The Promise of Politics

Hannah Arendt

Schocken Books, 2005

www.randomhouse.com/schocken/home.html

In her essay *The Tradition of Political Thought*, Hannah Arendt reminds us of Nietzsche's observation that man is "(t)he animal that can make promises." This essay is included in this newly-released posthumous collection whose work focuses on the most valuable of social promises of which man is capable: the *Promise of Politics*.

In this collection, Arendt begins at the beginning or, more accurately at two beginnings in political philosophy. The first is the trial and death of Socrates — an event that Arendt likens in the history of political thought with the importance of the trial and death of Christ in religion. Coming at the end of a golden age of Greek civilization, Socrates' death occasions a change in the way philosophy is viewed — the polis is no place for a genuine contest of ideas (Socrates' death proves that) and instead philosophy should prove a rarified habitat of intellectuals. This flight from the polis, illustrated vividly by the view of an ideal political leader in the allegory of the cave, remains the stigma of political philosophy to the present. Plato's view that the idea of the good must govern affairs (Arendt calls it "the tyranny of truth") has since made political philosophy in a democracy problematic from the birth of both democracy and philosophy. Arendt's work can be seen as an effort to build a space for a genuinely democratic political philosophy in the violence of the 20th century.

The second beginning Arendt addresses is a more technically philosophical one. As, with Heidegger, a student of Husserl, Arendt realizes that one's existence is based on the ordering of the phenomenological world, an ordering that begins for her (and most of the rest of the 20th century's philosophers) with language. Arendt finds a distinctly social order in language, recognizing that it is a tool built from our interactions with others used even in the privacy of our own heads in our internal conversations with our selves.

Finally, Arendt works out some ideas on ethics in an existential world by considering the philosophy of Jesus Christ. In Christ's work, she sees a way for humans to act ethically in an uncertain world. Every carries unintended consequences, so no action can be viewed as entirely good. How, then, does one act ethically? The answer, Arendt considers, lies in forgiveness — if we forgive, as Christ did, we absolve our fellow humans of the unintended consequences of their actions and in so doing merit forgiveness ourselves. In an essentially meaningless universe, Arendt's treatment of Jesus' work is interesting and compelling — even to a lapsed altar boy like myself.

The Promise of Politics, because it is a collection of previously unpublished lectures and essays, is not a single cohesive statement of Arendt's philosophy. It is, however, a reminder of the value of Hannah Arendt's work at a time when the politics of totalitarianism seem to be making a comeback, from Muslim extremists to reactionary Western politicians. And it can also serve as a useful introduction to one of the most im-

portant intellectuals of the brutal and unlamented 20th century and a thinker whose work deserves study by philosophers, politicians, Jewish scholars, and Clamor readers.

-Keith McCrea

Silenced: International Journalists Expose Media Censorship

Edited by David Dudge

Prometheus Books, 2005

www.prometheusbooks.com

Journalists have been called many names — nuisances, opportunists, sensationalists — but rarely public servants. Yet this remains an unwritten expectation in the job description of investigative reporters throughout the world in their thankless efforts to report the news and face the consequences. The fascinating book *Silenced: International Journalists Expose Media Censorship* is about outspoken journalists who risk life and limb to expose government corruption, engage in critical discourse, and inform the public.

Perseverance in the face of censorship is explored through the experiences of 14 professional journalists who put career and safety on the line to disclose what the powers that be would have hidden. Warned in no uncertain terms to maintain the status quo, these journalists, often with the collective agency of the journalistic community, chose instead to follow their ethical commitment to confront the powerful forces intent on keeping them quiet.

The book is an anthology of reporters' experiences in places from Australia to Eritrea and describes the vandalism, imprisonment, termination of employment, forced exile, beatings, and death threats they faced while doing their job.

What the book makes clear is that censorship takes several forms with different degrees of consequences. A German reporter was arrested after uncovering financial scandals in the European Union Commission. A Canadian columnist wrote an article condemning the concentration of media ownership that forced his newspaper to restrict lively opinion, alter editorial content and promote a conservative political agenda, knowing all along it would result in his forced resignation. One American reporter faced criticism and another the loss of his job when both refused to succumb to the popular patriotism that was sweeping the nation post-9/11. In Liberia, a British video news producer was charged with espionage for filming illegal logging at a port owned by Liberia's president. A Mexican political reporter was imprisoned for "defamation" after years of reporting on the complicity of public officials in the disappearances of women in the border state of Chihuahua and on police involvement with drug trafficking. And in Haiti, a radio broadcaster and democracy activist was murdered because he reported on the corruption of government officials.

More stories and perspectives from female journalists (only one is included) would have improved the book, but it remains interesting and comprehensive and offers compelling insights into the struggles and persecution faced by international journalists, as well as the methods used to uncover truths.

Silenced reads like a psychological thriller too engrossing to put down complete with police corruption, drug trafficking, murder, embezzlement and war. It is a story of briefings and press releases, unwritten newsroom rules, unpopular editorial decisions and (ineffective) freedom of information laws. It is about protecting sources or facing jail time. It is about silencing and unsilencing and the risk of both. Most importantly, *Silenced* is about the horror of seeing it all and the power of reporting it.

-Sena Christian

[AUDIO]

Ani Kyd

Evil Needs Candy Too

Alternative Tentacles Records

Alternativetentacles.com

Raise your hands, throw the devil forks, and make a chiropractor appointment because you can bet your ass you'll be head banging to this offering from Vancouver-native Ani Kyd.

Distorted guitars crunching so ferociously they sound like bones being fed through a meat grinder, drums getting beat harder than what Ali did to Sonny Liston, and that voice from Ms. Kyd; sounding like Siouxsie one minute and a throaty, guttural, female version of Lemmy from Motorhead the next — except her version of Lemmy seems to have bigger balls.

Although this is the first official release from Ani, she and her band have years of experience in the metal scene in Vancouver and abroad. Up in the Great White North she fronted the bands Rumble Fish and Spanking Machine among others; punk veteran Ian White from Che: Chapter 127 holds down the rhythm guitar along with Ani; Byron Stroud, of Fear Factory and Strapping Young Lad, gives the bass a proper thrashing, while Gene Hoglan, also of Strapping and classic metal outfits such as Testament and Death, pounds on the drums like a pissed-off eight-armed gorilla (and I mean that in the nicest and most-sincere metalhead fashion).

The overall sound reminds one of early Danzig and at some points Switchblade Symphony. But these are only mild comparisons even if they are warranted. Ani and the boys have their own feel, their own sound, their own projection. It's almost gothic, it's almost traditional metal, it's almost punk, it's almost hardcore, it's almost early-grunge; in other words fans of any of these genres will probably dig this album (one can almost see the moshpitters and smell the grunge kids at an Ani show).

At press time, no tour dates have been announced. But you won't need to tour announcements. Just follow the low rumblings and large cracks in the earth near your house and at the end of the chaos you'll find Ani and the band.

-Mike McHone

Apes

Baba's Mountain

The Birdman Group, 2005

www.thebirdmangroup.com

This CD starts off with some flutes and tribal drumming making you think you bought a native American folk music album, but from the dark and eerie feeling of it you know it isn't. The first real track starts out with the same eerie feeling and deep demonic voice making you think you bought an album by a death metal band grown tired of metal. Then when the normal vocals kick you're treated to an awesome dark psychedelic trip, but this is not an album you'd want to trip to with all the odd changes and odd voice that pop up throughout the songs. You like rock, you like organs; you like dark music pick this up at your earliest convenience.

-Alex Merced

Ari Ari

There's A New Sheriff in Town

Friction Records, 2005

www.frictionrecords.net

If there's such a genre as lo-fi indie noise art-rock, this must be it. Quite insane, but in a good way. It's very noisy for a rock band, but you can definitely still hear the melodies and the



Dirty Three

Cinder

Touch And Go

www.touchandgorecords.com

Certain albums sweep through a person right away, with indefinite impact. There's a resounding feeling of enjoyment that's tough to match when you aren't hearing those songs again. I'd venture to say Dirty Three's *Cinder* can be that album for you. Man, instrumental albums just have an aura to them, an aura that evokes more emotion without words than most can hope to with them. From the light pitter-patter of the snare drum at the beginning of "Ever Since" to the dissonant strumming and bagpipe inclusion that reaches a fevered pitch on "Doris," Dirty Three show us all a band truly hitting their stride. The cohesion between these musicians is nothing short of top notch, and the wistful, oceanic qualities of many of the songs will be your perfect soundtrack to a midsummer night's drive. The array of instrumentation here is definitely one of the better qualities, from the subtle drum rolls to the haunting violin on "Flutter," every piece of this puzzle compliments and expands on those before it. It doesn't take vocals to feel the emotion in these songs, and that accounts for a lot of its appeal. Spanning nineteen diverse songs, clocking in at seventy minutes, this album is an epic journey down every summer road you love to travel on with the windows down.

- Jordan Rogowski

The Don't Stop

From Ghettoes to Gold

Crafty Records, 2005

www.craftyrecords.net

This is overdriven blues garage rock from New York. The songs on this album will get your toes tapping, like stuff you'd find on Hellcat records (Tiger Army) but without the dark themes and only a few hints of rockabilly mixed into garage rock anthems of this album. While the vocals definitely fit this kinda of music, it doesn't quite come in with the same power as a lot of the bigger garage acts do, although he sounds fine and carries a few infectious melodies throughout the album. This is some raw un-polished rock, and if you dig it, then buy it.

-Alex Merced

Glue

Sunset Lodge

Shake It

www.shakeitrecords.com

This is just one guy speaking, but I find more merit in one underground hip-hop artist than ten in the mainstream. These underground artists, such as Talib Kweli and Mos Def just generally have far more intelligent social and political commentary to offer. Granted, that's not the concern of most in the mainstream, but lyrics about women and liquor are only fun for so long. So if you're looking for solid grooves, better flows, and some intelligent commentary, Glue's "Sunset Lodge" is sure to have both ears at attention. These MC's have something to say.

"We Need Aim" noddles with lines like "the government's always been scared of what they don't control, this isn't like trying to send cool hand Luke into the hole." "Steal the Crown" is essentially an entire track taking issue with the state of the nation, "The heroes hog the headlines while rebellion's never mentioned, while the struggle crumbles under corporate media's protection." Taking cues from Jurassic 5, Glue's style is a very loose, seemingly freeform flow, using beats and live instrumentation.

The songs are a fairly diverse mix as well, with "Still Eyes" lazily meandering through its 5 minute course, still maintain-

ing interest however. Solid flows, important lyrics, and tight grooves all add up to a very impressive effort courtesy of Glue. Keep on the lookout.

-Jordan Rogowski

Holy Roman Empire

Lost In Landscapes

Hewhocorrupts, 2005

www.hewhocorruptsinc.com

If you go into Holy Roman Empire's *Lost In Landscapes*, looking for anything remotely close to what the members used to be a part of, you'll be most likely confused and disappointed. Boasting members of the now defunct Suicide File and Shai Hulud, HRE play a style much more akin to a female fronted Sunny Day Real Estate.

Singer Emily Schambra has a temic, present voice that lifts above any of the driving guitars, but could just as soon carry any of their weight. It's a versatile sound that puts the band in a good position before the first chords are even struck. Either way, the band comes out swinging. Textured, dissonant guitars, splashing drums, and Schambra powerfully wailing above it all. "Topography" displays the band's stunning dynamics better than any other point, as an ominous melodic lean in before the full power of the band is actually unleashed. The band plays a lot with different sounds and tempos, but to their credit, it all gels perfectly. The bouncy nature of "Your Side" sounds just as good as the subtle, understated vocals and instrumentation of "Ways To Save Our Lives," where the vocals take on an angelic, choir-like quality before the guitars crash in at the end.

An extremely strong effort from a band with just as strong a background. Hardcore it is not, but fans of a multitude of genres ranging from indie to hardcore will find something to enjoy.

-Jordan Rogowski

Kid Icarus

The Metal West

Summersteps, 2005

P.O. Box 447

Moscow, PA 18444

This record has very little to do with either heavy metal music or the Nintendo video game Kid Icarus. It's more like Elliot Smith's later work. It shares the same experiments with composition, the same slightly depressive tone, and the same sad beauty. Most importantly, the foundation of the music is solid songwriting with a penchant for beautiful, folksy pop.

Singer/songwriter/guitarist/Summersteps label owner Eric Schlittler is much less tormented than the late Smith, which shows in both his music and lyrics. They aren't nearly as fragile or intense as anything on, say Either/Or. All of the songs paint pictures of a variety of characters: There's the alcoholic upstairs, angry ghosts, beekeepers on the edge of town, the flonst with a rare disease and aversion to light. Each song has an accompanying illustration in the CD booklet, collages of sketches, dioramas, paintings, and photographs that depict what the song is about, not unlike a Trail of Dead insert. A lot of care went into the presentation of this disc.

Enc has put out a ton of records, both with Kid Icarus and with other projects, and his experience shows in the technical quality of the music and recording. The instruments are layered with different effects to create a tapestry of sound that's interesting without being too crowded. The tracks vary from delicate acoustic songs to more electric guitar driven numbers, all showcasing musicianship that is skillful without being wanky. *The Metal West* is a solid effort, and worth a listen.

-Patnck Sean Taylor

aggressive, pissed-off style vocals with attitude. It's a chaotic release and a good one, too. I haven't heard this much noise and chaos since the mid-90's Norwegian black metal bands brought terror to the music world. An An isn't as dark or blasphemous as most black metal bands, though An An has their heavy guitar sounds at base and sounds a lot more like what the current metal bands are doing nowadays. No, not nu-metal but more like metal-core, only with much more noise and punky rock ala The White Stripes. The vocals are very reminiscent of Jack White but more lo-fi audio noise. The best part of all is that the vocalist of this band is named Jill (yes, she's a female). Go figure. This music is fresh.

-Adhab Al-Farhan

Bad Folk

Below the Law

Self Produced, 2005

P.O. Box 63098

Saint Louis, MO 63163

The Pogues were a group of punks playing traditional Irish music. St. Louis's Bad Folk are the American equivalent. They attack their banjos and acoustic and steel guitars to create music that combines country, folk, and punk. Singer Tim Rakehell's gravelly whiskey-and-cigarettes voice brings to mind a Southern Shane MacGowan. Hopefully he doesn't share Shane's proclivity for booze; I saw an interview with him a few years ago, and he makes Ozzy look coherent.

Below the Law is the kind of album made by people who die tragically, and get found by their neighbor weeks after the fact. The songs paint a picture of the failed lives of working class alcoholics and capture the false joy that comes with a few drunks. Others capture that early morning despair when the booze has worn off and depression sets in. It's all done a bit tongue in cheek, but I think they are much more serious than they let on. Their cover of "Plastic Jesus" is a good example of this. They turn the classic novelty country song into a melancholy funeral dirge, with obvious sadness behind the singer's smirk.

I like how Bad Folk breathe new life into traditional American music. I did occasionally wish that their lyrics were a little more current and fell less on stereotypical subjects like miners, trains, and the depression. That's a minor complaint, though. This is a good disc, and will fit perfectly between your Woody Guthrie and X cds.

-Patnck Sean Taylor

kid606

Resilience

Tigerbeat6, 2005

www.tigerbeat6.com

Electronic music, like instrumental hip-hop, only works when disparate sections of a single song come together through clever layering of simple loops. Resilience displays the ability of kid606 to do that. A wide variety of influences makes itself readily apparent on this release. There's reggae and dancehall, funk, hip-hop and old timey electronica from decades earlier. "Spanish Song" and "Phoenix Riddim" evoke island sounds with the dub style bass lines but add to the mix robot noises, monkeys and acoustic guitars for variety as well as for the pleasure of the listener. The most laid back number on Resilience comes in the form of "I Miss You." With its emotional sentiment one might not expect what one hears. Hand drums and electric piano sound calm cooing from the speakers. And if one were to define hip-hop in very broad terms, this track might fall under that definition. A bizarre ending to the album takes shape as "Audition." This final track is ambient, not to a fault though. There is actually music in there, just not a lot. Amongst the numerous recordings of a relatively short career, kid606 mashes typical musics into a mosaic of atypical noises — recommended for listeners of all electronic muzaks.

-Dave Cantor

Kim Phuc

4 Song Demo Cassette

goldenhappiness@gmail.com

Solid debut from some filthy Pittsburgh folks who take their name from a famous Viet Nam-era pin-up. Kim Phuc's music comes at the listener from what almost seems to be another dimension nowadays — fuzzed out punk rock with minimal hardcore influences, but back before there were guidelines and rules for this sort of stuff. The no-fi recording technique works really well, with most of these songs landing somewhere in Grim Klone Band meets The Reds territory. This could be some lost record your brother's burnout punker friend had stuffed in the back of his closet way back after he decided to 'go grunge'. The band is clearly not aspiring to much more than punchy, dirty Punk Rock and it works. The last song slows things down into almost a 'goth' type thing, adding elements of (very) early TSOL and 45 Grave to the soup.

These guys and their nutjob friends Brain Handle are the Pittsburgh bands to watch for in 2006. Trust me on this.

-Chad Kelsey

Brian Noring

The Check In

Smell the Stench, 2005

smellthestench@yahoo.com

Brian Noring has been quietly churning out microedition noise/improve/tape collage/culture CDR and cassette releases from his modest home in Des Moines, Iowa for ten years and counting now on his own FDR Recordings label — 150+ with no sign of slowing down. This, his latest, was self-released at the beginning of the year and now sees a more 'proper' release on the Australian Smell the Stench label. This is disc doesn't fall into Smell the Stench's usual run of power electronics and harsh noise, however. What we have here is improvised but well-practiced acoustic guitar instrumentals, all untitled. As Noring is quick to admit, these cuts tend toward Derek Bailey worship — full of sputters, plunks, plinks, and scrapes — in some cases on top of background noise or percussion. It can be jarring and disorienting, but can change into gorgeous psychedelic free folk at the drop of a hat and Noring gives the songs plenty of time to unfold. With this release, Noring has created a cohesive work that transports the listener to another state, something this kind of music aspires to but rarely achieves. The results are excellent — dive in, the water's warm.

-Chad Kelsey

Phantom Limbs

Random Hymns

Gold Standard Laboratories, 2005

www.GoldStandardLabs.com

Hailing from blue collar Oakland, forever in the shadow of the Jewel of The Bay, Phantom Limbs blow through this 5 song EP like a Hurricane Dennis sweeping across the helpless plains of Florida and bring the spotlight back over to the East Bay to let us know that the boys from O-town aren't about to play second fiddle to The City By The Bay. Active within the Bay Area scene since 1999 and now extending their reach much further afield thanks to relentless touring and consistently fine recorded output, the Limbs' sound has the feel and aggression of punk tempered with the deft keyboard work of Stevenson Sedgwick, who, by his own admission,

owes no small debt to Sparks and, in particular, the unique keyboard work of Ron Mael. So you know this music's got some depth to it, along with some nice, melodic touches. There's more than a passing nod to The Stranglers in there as well, but, in the end, this is Phantom Limbs' music that, while obviously influenced by others (whose music isn't?), forges a path all its own. They definitely take a very strange detour on this EP, as the track, "Jackalope Rising", is much more experimental than anything else on here and features band chatter, speech samples, and is generally a pastiche of things weird and wacky over its nearly 10 minute duration. Overall this is a fine glimpse into the workings of a band that excel in a live setting.

-Ray Boreham

The Plus Ones

Oh Me Of Little Faith

Insubordination Records, 2005

www.insubordinationrecords.com

Who doesn't love a warm, inviting indie pop record every once in a while? There's that certain appeal to some records that just make them, fun. The Plus Ones' "Oh Me Of Little Faith" is an effort that falls directly into that category. Crisp, crunchy guitars, simple structures, and three part harmonies all add up to the right equation for the group.

Now before you're turned off by the image of some boring, cutesy songs put over by the singer's charming voice, you'll be pleased to know that the band is equally in tune with their abilities to rock. "She's Not A Metaphor," while primarily low tempo, offers up some loud, crunchy guitars that puts the Plus Ones at a much faster pace than most of the rest of their material will allow. The versatility says a lot for the group, who can write equally enjoyable songs with either style.

Things continue to progress well, and fluidly all the way through the acoustic closer "Irony Is Easy." As with the rest of the album, it becomes more and more apparent that the sense of melody and harmony is the strongest attribute to be found here. The songs are well crafted, with solid rhythms and some fairly clever lyrical moments. "She keeps me warm, but she's cool, so she's not the sun / And she's no dream because as a rule, I'm asleep for one."

By the time you bounce and careen through the album's 11 tracks, there's nothing left but a smile on your face. Intelligent, quirky, and fun, the Plus Ones are able to cover all their bases.

-Jordan Rogowski

Propagandhi

Potemkin City Limits

Fat Wreck Chords, 2005

www.fatwreck.com

Quickly. I only have a minute and not very much space. We received this CD just before we ship the magazine to the printer, and it needs to be mentioned that all the music reviews we've printed in this issue are for naught. I'm sorry if you've read a bunch already — it's good practice. But they're worthless because none of them, not a single release, will remind you how crucial music is and should be for saving this planet from imploding on its self-important ass. None of the releases here will assure you, as Propagandhi has been doing for over ten years now, that a band can use more than 10% of their collective brain and STILL make music that will make your heart race like the first time you realized music would save your pathetic life. After all the shit I've seen come across my desk in the last five years, I needed the reminder. Thanks, boys. Good luck.

-Jason Kucsma





R.A.M.B.O.

Bring It! (CD w/DVD)
Havoc Records, 2005
www.havocrex.com

Andy Nelson of Jade Tree's *Paint It Black* says it best: "This thing is fucking inspirational. The show with them playing in the middle of the street in Indonesia with hundreds of people watching is incredible." R.A.M.B.O. seriously fucking come hard with it on this amazing CD/DVD release.

The CD is a worthy addition to Havoc Records' ever-expanding catalog of ass-kicking. Brandishing one of the most brutal guitar sounds this pud has ever heard, R.A.M.B.O. tear shit up good while casting a jaundiced eye around mid-decade America. From the perfectly American eating-animals-to-lose-weight loopiness of 'Atkins' America' to the 'Beatdown Collective's call to defend our communities and ourselves against fascists, R.A.M.B.O. balances being EXTREMELY pissed with a more thoughtful desire to find solutions. I even like the reading list - generally a Sting-like kiss of death.

The DVD is also first-rate. It celebrates the international D.I.Y. networks of people working together, features some pretty funny tour footage (hey, I'm always up for an 'Another State of Mind' joke...), and shows the band at their best, nipping it up on stage. Rarely do I see something like this and watch it more than once, but this one has seen the DVD player alot lately.

Buy this. This shows how one group of people has worked with likeminded folks to build anti-globalization spaces in a global environment. "Think Globally, Act Locally"? Fuck that. R.A.M.B.O. is thinking and acting both globally and locally. And we need alot more of that.

-Keith McCrea

The Real McKenzies

10,000 Shots
Fat Wreck Chords
www.fatwreck.com

For years now Fat Wreck Chords has been a real force in the punk scene. Releasing albums from NOFX, Lagwagon, and Strung Out just to name a few, few have been able to match the output in the punk scene that Fat has been able to offer.

Latest on the assembly line is the Real McKenzies' "10,000 Shots," a band equal parts Social Distortion and Scottish drinking songs. Using different tempos, the McKenzies scruffy Scottish delivery is always full of vigor and enthusiasm, and the bagpipes just make you want to sing and drink right along with the album. Simple punk rock at it's core, there's still some great melodic guitar moments that aren't far off from something in the Bad Religion catalog.

It's the Scottish flavor, though, that makes each of these songs just as enjoyable as the one that proceeded it. "13" is a rousing, speedy track begging to be sung along to. The guitar work is probably the best of the album, and the vocals are nothing short of spot on.

If you're expecting more than some solid, drunken anthems to be rousingly recreated at 4 in the morning with some brews and buddies, you might be let down. But regardless, this is a genuinely fun record just begging to be heard.

-Jordan Rogowski

The Red Rose Girls

s/t
Empty Records, 2005
www.emptyrecords.com

For fans of "old-timey" music, the self-titled Red Rose Girls album is not one to miss. The album is a compendium of both traditional music and old favorites from well-recognized names such as The Carter Family and Bill Monroe.

The Red Rose Girls — Annika Forrest, Kaisa Bourgidu, and Vanessa Veselka — are an ensemble first and foremost, and each take a turn with lead vocals on several songs, while their voices mingle like fine threads on others.

What you find in this album is what you might have found sixty years ago in the hills and on the back roads of the rural south. From "Mansions in the Sky" which echoes with memories of old church hymnals before there were hymn books, to the plucky tones of "Dissatisfied," the harmonies are simple and entertaining. This album is what it is: no phony accents, no fancy musical effects, just pure guitar and clear voices harmonizing lyrics that will make you think, make you mourn, or make you raise an eyebrow.

-Lindsey Leffew

Regulations

s/t
Havoc Records, 2005
www.havocrex.com

Black Flag — "Jealous Again." The Germs — "(G)" Jerry's Kids — "Boston, Not L.A." Bad Religion — "How Could Hell Be Any Worse?" Scandinavian. Buy Now

-Keith McCrea

Stamen & Pistils

End of the Sweet Parade
Echelon Productions
www.echelonproductions.com

Perhaps the biggest surprise on the soundtrack for 2004's *Garden State* was Iron and Wine's cover of the Postal

Service's "Such Great Heights." Well, let's be specific: the surprise wasn't the covering so much as the fact that the Postal Service's techno-ey glitchpop translated wonderfully into a whispery acoustic arrangement. If one were to mesh those two acts together, you might come up with Stamen & Pistils. The D.C.-area group melds acoustic guitars and hushed voices with foamy, puring computers. The vocals and lyrics are introverted, while the electronic noise is talkative, at times deafening. Occasionally the Sweet Parade's concept exceeds its execution: the singing is gawky and untrained, and S&P prontize fiddling with ambient textures over articulate songwriting. But on the whole, Stamen & Pistils break such imaginative ground that one is left counting possibilities rather than annoyances. By casting their electronics as warm and charming narrators, these musicians' voices and instruments become cold, uncompromising antagonists. It's the complete opposite of the typical folk-pop arrangement — which is reason enough to watch what happens next.

-Dan Barry

Thee Shams

Sign the Line
Shake It Records, 2005
www.theeshams.com

Thee Shams might be a victim of their own allegiance to garage rock: while *Sign the Line* has all the elements of a great rock record, the muddy mix buries the vocals and the drums are almost overwhelming. This sounds almost like a live recording, and while I imagine the band would put on a fantastic show, they certainly don't get any extra points for recording in a studio that sounds like a basement.

If you can get beyond the production quality, you'll discover a sexy, bluesy five some that blend the sounds of the Delta and Detroit. SEE magazine described them as "Stax meets Sun meets Chess," and for those of you who haven't memorized the "Rock Snob's Dictionary," (ed note — we at Clamor expect you've all done so) that means they blend the best of old Motown and new lo-fi rock. "Everflowing Tune" is the best example of their ability to seamlessly meld genres: the song starts off as a quick guitar based number and switches midway to feature piano prominently over muttered lyrics. Towards the end of the record, the songs begin to sound a little repetitive, but "1-2-3-4's" use of croons that could have been lifted from a Joe Cocker record give it a nice touch.

Overall, Thee Shams show a lot of promise, given better production, they could be the next White Stripes or Black Keys.

-Cortney Harding

xbxrx

Sixth in Sixes
Polyvinyl, 2005
www.polyvinylrecords.com

These boys hail from the Bay Area by way of the South, and have been playing their twisted brand of punk for about five years. Their background shows in their sound — a little Southern hardcore mixed with the experimental noise-core one finds around the Bay. The high-pitched screamed vocals and general spazziness reminded me of Charles Bronson (the band, not the actor) and Nick Blinko: the keyboards and general fucked-uppedness owe at least something to the Locust.

However, xbxrx are far from dervative, with a sound, aesthetic, and philosophy that's all their own. Known for their chaotic live shows, (lasting from ten seconds to thirty minutes with occasional emergency room visits, they also have an arty weirdness that has made fans out of some unlikely figures in indie rock. Their first disc, 2000's *Gop Ist*

Minee was produced by underground legend Steve Albini, and they've opened for Deerhoof, Sonic Youth, Peaches, Unwound, and Q and Not U. That's pretty remarkable considering that *xbrrx* are basically a hardcore band, and would be more at home on Prank or 625 than Kill Rock Stars.

Sixth in Sixes, the group's second full-length, contains 18 songs in 25 minutes and is an unrelenting assault of guitars, keyboards, drums, and screaming. The lyrics criticize cops, religion, consumerism, and apathy. The lyrics are great, with lines like "A block so thick/ taller than our vision/ we're pushing against a formal version of time/ born dead but came out alive."

Xbrrx are much more than just another hardcore band. Pick this up and go see them live before they either break up or end up in traction.

-Patrick Sean Taylor

[VIDEO]

The Future of Food

Deborah Koons Garcia, 2005

www.thefutureoffood.com

What does it take to grow food?

When faced with this question, how do you answer? With idyllic images of family farms, open pastures, wheat blowing in the wind, and red barns?

If this image sounds familiar to you, pay attention. In her new documentary, *The Future of Food*, Deborah Koons Garcia introduces the viewer to the reality of American farming. Today, less than 2% of the American population farms, meaning that we do not really know from where our food comes. And the truth may shock you.

The Future of Food provides an in-depth look at genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, and their pervasive entry into agriculture in the United States. GMOs are organisms that have been altered using viral and bacterial genes to be resistant to pesticides, or to be pesticides themselves. GMOs entered the agriculture industry once the Supreme Court ruled that it was legal to patent life.

The ability to patent life has had a profound impact on the agricultural industry in America. It means that agribusinesses, such as Monsanto, can patent both the seed they create in the laboratory as well as naturally occurring seed. Although it is now property of the company, the seed can reproduce, meaning it can contaminate the fields of farmers who do not grow GMO products. The twofold result is catastrophic: the farmer loses all of his grain, plus any saved seed, and the farmer faces enormous litigation from the agribusiness industry, whether or not the GMO seed was intentionally used.

Despite the fact that the safety of GMO food has never truly been tested, the government has approved its release to the widespread public, in many instances in direct opposition to its own scientists' warnings. That foods made from GMOs are not required to be labeled means that every day we consume food and we have no idea where it came from, or if it is truly natural.

How were those tomatoes you ate yesterday? Did they contain extra viruses and bacteria you weren't planning on eating? What about the corn you had last week? Was it grown to be a pesticide in and of itself?

Because we all eat, we are all affected by genetic engineering and GMOs in our food and *The Future of Food* introduces the viewer to these issues in an interesting and accessible manner, explaining the scientific nature of GMOs and the current and potential political, societal, medical, and agricultural problems they pose. Garcia's film deftly explains the core issue of agribusiness controlling our food supply, and responds to this issue by introducing counter-

revolutionary food supply sources beginning to gain popularity in the United States. *The Future of Food* raises awareness of a massive issue which has largely flown under the radar of public consciousness in America for many years, giving the public the opportunity to make better, healthier, more informed choices while shopping for food.

Ultimately, *The Future of Food* is a film every American should see. If each of us takes a moment to question from where our food comes, and to make informed decisions about what we are eating, we will, as Garcia hopes, stem the power and influence of the agriculture industry, allowing us to feel safe and confident about what we are putting in our bodies.

So where did those chips you're eating come from, anyway?

- Jessica Haile

The Real Thing: Coca, Democracy and Rebellion in Bolivia

Jim Sanders, Director

Dada World Data, 2005

When, George Bush Sr. declared a "War on Drugs," the Bolivian government undertook a costly militarized campaign to eradicate the coca leaf from the Chapare region of Bolivia. Fifteen years later, according to the documentary *The Real Thing*, Bush's declaration of war has done little to reduce the market for cocaine, but everything to infuse energy into Bolivian social movements. It is an overview of the "real," complex situation on the ground in Bolivia that the film endeavors to capture.

For Americans, coca is best known as the source ingredient for cocaine, but for hundreds of years in Bolivia, the leaf has been revered as sacred for its medicinal properties. When coca eradication efforts were first undertaken, they were supposed to be accompanied by alternative development projects to compensate farmers for the loss of their coca crops. But, in reality, the alternative projects have done little to make up for the loss of coca. Shock therapy practices applied to the Bolivian economy as suggested by the



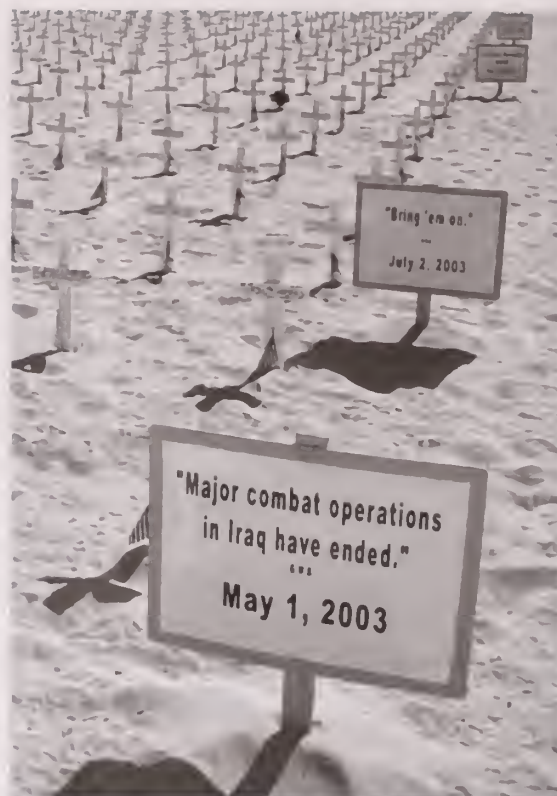
IMF have only further worsened the situation. In response, Bolivian workers and farmers organized into the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), which has been so popular that the leader, Evo Morales nearly won the presidency in 2002. In recent months the situation in Bolivia has erupted into instability and this makes the film relevant, if somewhat outdated.

The Real Thing is Jim Sanders' first film, and it's sometimes obvious. Toward the beginning there is an unnecessarily long road trip sequence that could have used an edit, and throughout the film shaky camera work sometimes distracts from the information being presented. But interviews with key officials, leaders, and scholars lend the film weight and make it worth watching, especially given the current situation. Official statements from US representatives do much to underline the gap between US policy and South American realities, and testimonies from Bolivians do an apt job of presenting the unofficial or "real" story. Comments from Noam Chomsky, in particular, do an excellent job of putting the US-Bolivia relationship in a broader global, historical perspective.

This is this glimpse of the broader perspective that is the service provided by *The Real Thing*: When the US is increasingly meddling in global affairs, and the situation in Bolivia remains unstable, it's important to have an honest overview and critique of the situation on the ground. In the words of the filmmakers, *The Real Thing* is more than a "guerrilla-styled documentary" about cocaine and the US led "War on Drugs" in Bolivia, it is also "a case study in the role US foreign policy plays in repressing people's movements and in fomenting dissent and resistance around the world."

-Erica Wetter





Santa Barbara, California

Walk along the sandy shore of Santa Barbara's waterfront and you'll find among the surf and happy beach goers, a touching and sobering memorial aptly named Arlington West. Next to the well-known tourist hot spot of Stearns Wharf, the Santa Barbara Chapter of Veterans for Peace No. 54 has planted white crosses in the sand, one for every soldier killed in Iraq. In silent protest the Veterans hand out postcards and console those who breakdown into tears. The occasional candle light vigil has illuminated the beach-front as far as the eye can see with candles placed delicately at the base of each cross.

Everyday from sunrise to sunset the volunteers of Veterans for Peace mark the rising death toll with new crosses. Hoping and praying to place their last cross in the sand once and for all. ★

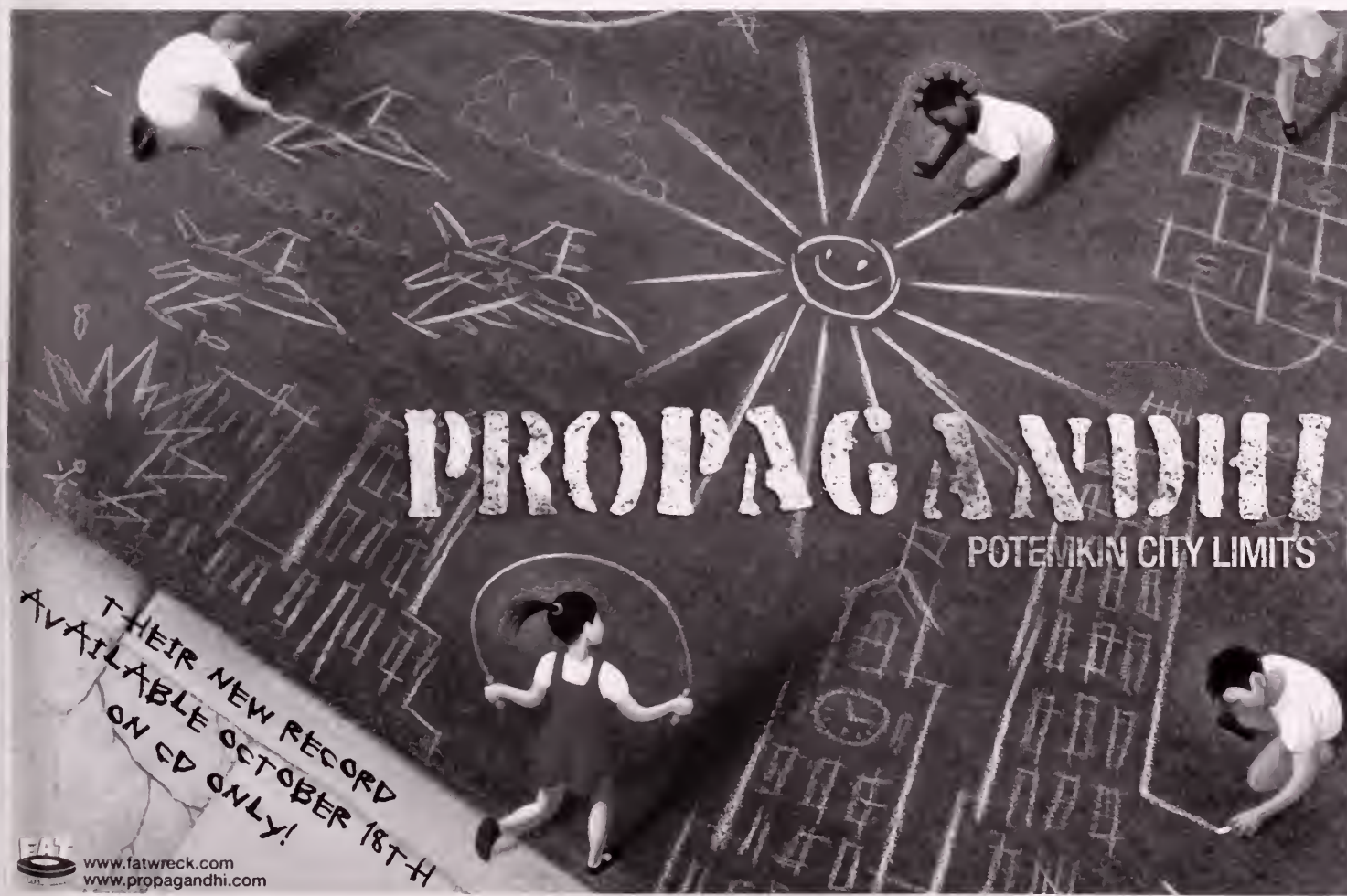
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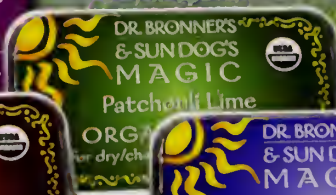
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